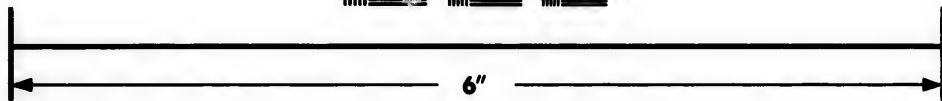
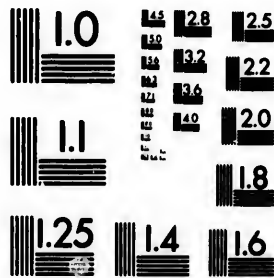


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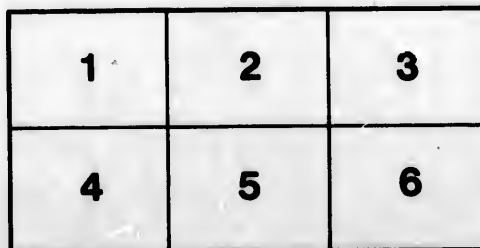
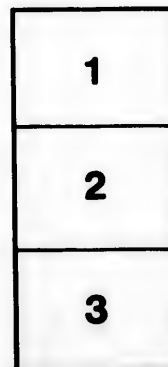
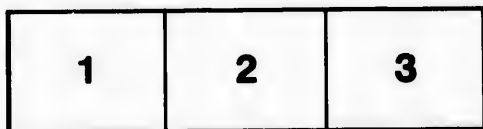
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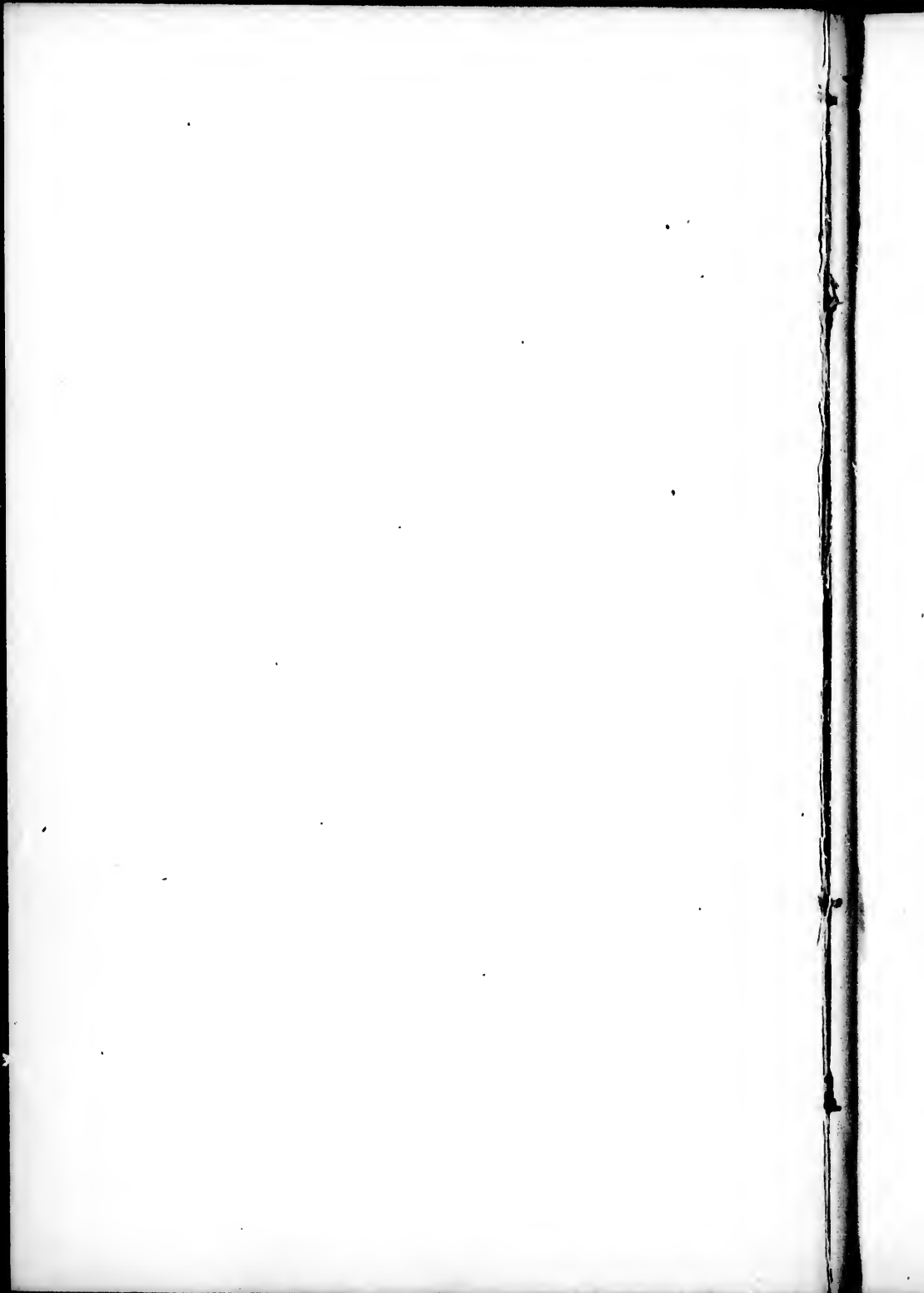
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SERMONS.



SERMONS

ON

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

BY THE LATE

REV. C. W. HAWKINS, B.A.,

*Minister of the Methodist Church of Canada,
(London Conference.)*

COLLECTED FROM HIS MANUSCRIPTS BY HIS
WIFE.

WITH INTRODUCTION

BY THE

REV. W. J. MAXWELL,

GUELPH.

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INTRODUCTION.

“F making many books there is no end.” This little volume kindly asks a place alongside its predecessors. It asks the reader to criticise mildly. It resembles the temple in one particular. He who collected the material was not allowed to finish the work. The author, Rev. C. W. Hawkins, B.A., died while but a youth in the ministry. He left behind scores of spiritual children. They can say of him, “My father! my father!” In this book they may find the sermon or sentence that won them for Christ, or warned them “to flee from the wrath to come.” Should the reader pronounce its utterances simple, then are they more Christ-like; are they lacking in profun-

dity, forget not that by the seeming "foolishness" of this preaching men have been saved. The sentences of this book were consecrated to God's service, at their birth, in prayer. The mind from whence they came was pure. The lips from which they fell were touched with "the live coal." They were radiant with a pentecostal fire. They will be remembered by the inhabitants of St. Catharines, Thorold, Grimsby, Oakville, Beamsville, and other places where they were preached. Regarding them as weapons that had good service in them, his friend has gathered them from the manuscripts, and now begs to put into the hands of the public this unpretentious volume, with the hope and prayer that the Sermons here contained may do the Master's work, and that Rev. C. W. Hawkins, being dead, may continue, through them, still to preach.

W. J. M.

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SERMONS ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

I.

A Covenant Service.

“And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul.”—2 *Chron.* xv. 12.

IT is said that history repeats itself. If this is true of the civil history of nations, it is much more true of the history of God's people. To one who has been a diligent student of Bible history, and an attentive observer of the course of many who profess to be serving God to-day, there is a very marked resemblance between them. More than that: many who are themselves striving to serve God, and who diligently read their Bibles, cannot well have failed to notice a resemblance between their own experience and the history of God's people in the past—how many partial reformations there were—how frequently we

read of the idol groves being cut down, the high places and idols being destroyed! Influenced by some Divine chastisement because of their sin, their repentance seems genuine and the work permanent. We are ready to think they will never again fall or need to be punished; but a few years pass, a new ruler comes on the stage, and again we read of the law of God forsaken, of idols of groves and of high places. Then there is a fresh punishment and another apparent reformation. Their reformations were but partial. Some seed of evil was left undestroyed, and from this seed a crop of the weeds of sin soon sprang again. Their backslidings were numerous and grievous. So, my friends, many an apparent reformation in an individual or in a community in modern times has been but short-lived. A time of revival has come to a community. God's word has proved as a two-edged sword, piercing to the "dividing asunder of soul and spirit," revealing the secret thoughts and intents of the heart. As men have seen the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men, they have stopped in their sin—have repented of it—it has seemed as though a very great and very lasting change had come. But our congratulations and rejoicings are scarcely over when they are mingled with regret and disappointment.

There are soon evidences that in some at least the cure was but partial, and the disease again commences to spread. They lose sight of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and forget the wrath of God, and return, as the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. The history of Christianity in many a community, and in many a heart, has been, as with the Jews of old, a series of advances and retrogressions, of ebbs and flows. The cause then, I believe, was what the cause now, I believe, is, that the reformations are but partial. Every vestige of idolatry was not destroyed; some excuse would be used to save something that would soon prove a temptation and a snare to the people. So now every temptation to sin is not avoided. Some little, apparently trivial sin has been spared, and it has proved the fruitful source of a flood of evil. While at all times there should be a watchful care over our own experiences, yet the history of the Church proves the need of periodical heart-searchings and of periodical re-covenantings.

I. As an essential condition of the acceptance of our consecration of ourselves to God, there must be a separation from sin (v. 8). No soul can be accepted of God while there is conscious, wilful clinging to sin. Sin is that which separates people from God—which causes God to

forsake His people. And the first step in coming back to God is the abandonment of sin. The most gracious promises of God's word are coupled with requirement to put away sin. God says, "Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well." Then, "Come and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet." "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous his thoughts." Then sin, consciously and wilfully indulged, invalidates all covenants of the past, as far as God's fulfilling the covenant engagements are concerned, for it is a breach of the terms of the covenant, and it unfits for covenanting in the future while it is retained. God will not enter into covenant relationship with you while you are in alliance with His foes. A nation could make to-day a friendly treaty with Russia, and yet be an active ally of Turkey. A nation might pretend friendship with one, while secretly being bound by treaty to the other. Yet, it is impossible for us to enter into a covenant with God which He will recognize, unless we enter the deadly exterminating war against sin. The utter incompatibility, the deadly antagonism between the service of God and sin must be fully recognized by the soul entering into covenant with Him. It is well

for us attentively to study the terms of the covenant—the conditions on which God will enter into covenant with us. To attempt to covenant with God while we are consciously, wilfully clinging to sin is a most awful mockery and sin. To do it unconsciously and unintentionally is to have in the heart that which will prove a temptation and a snare. Let us then, in the first place, examine ourselves. Let us not conclude, because we have been for years professors of religion, that therefore we may neglect this careful scrutiny. Have not our grievous departures from God, in heart if not in life, been proofs that something has been allowed to creep in which is unfriendly to Christ? Has not our want of success in winning men to Jesus been caused by something retained in the heart? As a preacher, have I permitted sin to exist unreprieved in our midst? As parents, have you in your households permitted some conformity to the world to prevail? Are there any customs which our fathers condemned, and which the pious in all ages have condemned, and which our consciences, enlightened by God's word, condemns, arising among us? The abominations which the Jews permitted to creep in with idolatry do not prevail; but, my friends, in unholy customs, or pestilent literature, or unholy

associations permitted about our homes, there may be that which is as offensive to God. As all good housekeepers find it necessary to periodically cleanse their houses, so it is well for us to periodically cleanse our churches, and to cleanse our homes and our hearts. Look about you ; look within ; gather all that is offensive to God, and destroy it in His presence.

II. A consecration of ourselves should include a consecration of our worldly goods (v. 11). The tithes and offerings of the Jews were not merely gifts to the temple service, but recognitions of his proprietorship in all that they had. So, my friends, our covenanting with God is not merely to perform certain spiritual duties, but to include all we have. When a man gives himself to God, everything is included. There is nothing a Christian has on which he can lay his hand and say, "This is mine. The Lord has no part in this." The more distinctly we recognize God's claims, even in our temporal affairs, the more intelligently we enter into covenant with Him. In the management of our business, and in the disposal of our property, as well as in the management of our spiritual affairs, God's will must be consulted, and, as far as known, must be obeyed. A Christian is not to suppose that merely what he directly gives to the Lord's

cause belongs to the Lord, but also what he retains for the support of his family and the carrying on of his worldly interests. Some persons seem to suppose that when they have given a certain portion to God's cause they have no need to consult Him, or refer to His will with reference to the rest. Your Mondays as well as your Sundays belong to the Lord. All the difference is, one is more directly employed in spiritual things than the other. So your wealth employed for other purposes belongs to God as well as that which you devote more directly for spiritual work. You need money for your own clothing, and comfort, and sustenance, and if parents, for the clothing, education, etc., of your children, and God is willing you shall have it, as well as also for prudent provision for the future, and for the carrying on of your business. But you and I must remember that in all these we are but stewards, and for the way in which we dispose of our wealth are responsible to God. In all these things we must dispose of our wealth so as to please God. God has intended that the industrious and the careful shall have abundant supplies. The provisions of nature are, it seems to me, evidences of this. While God is the author of our worldly supplies, and gives us so bountifully, surely we

should not, in our managing of that which He has enabled us to acquire, forget the claims of His cause. While the Christian is in duty bound to make such provision as he can for his family, he is also in duty bound to make such provision as he can for the claims of charity. The poor, where there are such, must be remembered. The spread of the Gospel must also be regarded. He would not be acting rightly who, by his giving, left his family unprovided for. He would not be acting rightly who, in providing for his family, left the cause of God unprovided for. Both are legitimate claimants. Neither can be justly overlooked. In making disposal of his means, a man should seek to so adjust matters that all claimants, whether for the cause of God or any other, should get its proportion. Let a man adjust these claims intelligently, and in the sight of the God who really has a right to all. In the Old Testament the claims were adjusted for the people, and by law a tenth was devoted to God. I do not think we have any such law in our dispensation. If a man were compelled to give a certain amount, his giving would be no real criterion of his love for God or His cause. It would be just as the taxes paid, a matter of necessity. Every man must do as he proposeth. But let him remember that

what he purposeth and what he giveth are an evidence to God and to man of his interest in God's cause. But surely, in a dispensation of greater light and greater privilege, we should not make use of the liberty God gives us to withhold from what he claimed from others in a less privileged generation. There are few matters about which there is so great a difference. Some, it seems to me, must give to-day more than a tenth, and some, I fear, give scarcely a hundredth. Let every man, in covenanting with the Lord, arrange the matter according to the light he has, and guided by God's word and his own conscience. Many say, if I were but rich I would give. The best way to test yourselves is to ask how you do now. Those who are miserly when poor, almost always grow more so when rich.

III. A covenanting should include a binding of ourselves to the performance of spiritual duties. There are, in this age in which we live especially, men who, perhaps, come up to the requirements of God's law in the particular I have just been adverting to. They give liberally of their means to support God's cause but utterly neglect spiritual duties. By these I refer to the attendance on public worship, reading God's word, private prayer, self-examination. In all these ways we should covenant

to seek the Lord with all our heart and with all our soul. If we neglect these, the tone of our piety will decline inevitably, and our religion will degenerate into a form. We should bind ourselves to attend the public Sabbath ministrations. I am glad that our people do as well in this respect as they do. With a few exceptions, the regularity is all that I could ask. If there is one here who has neglected this matter in covenanting with the Lord, resolve, as a matter of duty, to attend to this. Then remember the mere coming to the house of God is not all our duty. We come to hear God's word expounded, and to apply it to ourselves. Have you received the truth in the love of it—not merely that truth which may be pleasing, but that which has condemned you? Have you resolved to act on the light God gives—to do your duty when it is made known, no matter how much you may naturally feel disinclined to it? Or have you reserved to yourself the right to cull the truths of God's word—to accept and act on those which suit you, and to reject and refuse to be guided by those which do not suit? In covenanting with God, let us have this distinctly in view. We are not to choose what commands we can obey, and which disregard; we covenant to obey, by the grace of God, those which are opposed to our

natural inclinations as well as those which are not. Then, again, our attendance at the sanctuary from Sabbath to Sabbath is not merely to hear an exposition of God's word. That is a mistake into which the Church seems to have fallen. The great object is to hear a sermon. Too frequently other parts of the service are ignored. The idea of worship seems too much to be lost sight of. What little worship there is, is done by proxy. The preacher prays, and the choir sings, and the congregation look on or listen—too frequently, I fear, with impatience—to a part of the service in which they should engage. In the Church of England prayers, the people are expected to join. We reject that as too formal. In the olden times of Methodism and of Israel, it seems the people said, Amen. We reject that as savouring of enthusiasm; and in our endeavour to escape formality on the one side and enthusiasm on the other, I fear we have sometimes fallen into a worse mistake than either—that of losing both the form and the spirit. If in these respects we have been erring in the past in covenanting with the Lord, have these mistakes in view. When the minister prays, let us, in heart at least, say Amen. When the choir sing, let us answer the Psalmist's prayer when he prayed, "Let the people

praise thee ; yea, Lord, let all the people praise thee." Then there are other duties to the performance of which you bind yourselves. There is the public meeting for prayer. Have you been as regular in your attendance at this ? Alas ! there are numbers who are never seen there. There may be excuses, but surely there are none for constant absence. A lack of interest in these, in a church or in an individual, shows a low state of piety. If we could but see our prayer-meetings again attended by all our people seeking the Lord, then we might confidently look for times of refreshing. Then there is the study of God's word. I rejoice at the increased interest in the study of the Bible manifest in our schools, but we must remember it is not merely a text-book for our Sabbath-schools, to be laid aside when we leave. It is the chart of the narrow way. It contains all the rules of holy living, and numerous illustrations from actual life of those rules. It contains the will of our Heavenly Father, and the Christian's title to His heavenly inheritance, and the only description we have of that inheritance. It is an exhaustless store of instruction and of comfort, of warning and reproof. Have you studied and searched the Scriptures ? Not have you read a few hurried verses at family devotions,

or a chapter now and then on a Sabbath afternoon when almost in a doze, but have you looked for instruction and help from this word? Again, have you attended to private devotions? A man's private devotions are a better criterion of his piety than his public. In public we may be influenced by the customs of society—we may merely be conforming to the requirements of the Church we belong to or attend; but in private, uninfluenced by the opinions of men, our devotions are very nearly an exact expression of our religious life. There is power in real prayer; there is enjoyment in real prayer. Have we realized them? Another duty is frequent self-examination; not by the standard of morality prevailing in the community around us, but by the requirements of God's word. Do we excuse shortcomings by the weakness of humanity or the customs of society or do we condemn them in ourselves just as sternly as God's word condemns them? Are we striving after the perfect pattern left us in God's word? Are the rough places in us being made smooth? the unholy tempers being destroyed. Are the crooked ways being made straight? the disposition, everything like guile or deceit being taken out? While we are anxious about others, about church work, let us be careful to have our own hearts right. The

want of the Church may be expressed by one word—that is, spirituality. That includes or implies everything else.

IV. It implies taking upon ourselves solemn obligations. "They swear unto the Lord." My own experience and judgment leads me to say, make as few solemn vows as possible. There is danger lest the frequency of the act lessen the feeling of solemnity or obligation. Then there is, perhaps, greater danger that if it be done frequently it will sometime be done rashly. Many a man with reference to some small thing has made a vow, and afterwards repented of it. Two rules I would lay down with reference to this matter of vowing: 1st. Never make a solemn vow unless it be a matter of importance. If in every small duty separately we enter into a solemn covenant, we run the danger I have already pointed out, of some day binding ourselves in some matter with reference to which we may afterwards change our mind, and we lessen by the frequency our feeling of solemn obligation. The feeling of awful obligation we realize when we make a solemn vow, is a feeling we should reserve if I may so speak, for the most important work. 2nd. Never, except it be the clearest case, make a vow. Now, the claims of the service of God answer both these. It is im-

portant—more important than we can well realize. To attend to such a matter, we do well to bind ourselves by the strongest possible bonds. There are times when the importance of this matter does not appear to us. If at such a time, in the hum of business, in the hurry of life, some temptation comes suddenly upon us, even as we have resolved to serve God, the strength of an ordinary resolution is not enough to keep us. It will be well to be bound by the strong cable of the most solemn vows. Then, again, it is not only a matter of vast importance, but also of great clearness as to duty. You need have no fear of ever having a doubt about your duty to serve God or gain heaven. With reference to many minor particulars you may change your mind—Church relations, etc. There are many who, year by year, have known the vast importance, have felt their duty to be clear, yet do not act. Not rashly, but calmly, deliberately, intelligently, enter into obligation to serve God. The greatness of the Being with whom you are covenanting, the infinite importance of the interests involved, add to the solemnity of what under any circumstances is solemn.

V. The result of the covenanting—"The people rejoiced at the oath." It is a solemn thing, yet a most blessed thing—the privilege of enter-

ing into covenant with the great God. When you sincerely do enter into covenant with God, He does with you. While your part of the covenant is expressed by giving up yourselves—repentance, obedience, faith, etc.—He on His part promises to be your God. God's part of the covenant is expressed by all the promises, which are intended for all His people. Think of the promises. How rich your heritage the moment you enter into covenant with God! He is pledged to guide, protect, to save. The day you avouch the Lord to be your God, that day he avouches you to be His people, and all the blessings of the covenant are yours. The atonement of Jesus cancels your sin; the blood of Jesus cleanses your guilt; the Spirit of God helps your infirmities; the arm of God will lift you to heaven.

The result of covenanting—"The people rejoiced at the oath." The covenant is solemn, but not necessarily gloomy or productive of unhappiness. In fact, it is possible for our moments of deepest solemnity to be our moments of deepest happiness. To be permitted to enter into covenant relationship with God is a great privilege. To think that when we sincerely covenant to be His, He does promise to be ours; to think of all the promises that

are ours, which expresses God's side of the covenant ; to be able to sing,

“'Tis done, the precious ransom's paid,”

there is a satisfaction deeper and more abiding than the satisfaction that comes from any other transaction, just as the interests involved are more important than any other. If I am my God's, He is mine in all the wealth of blessing He promises to His people. From the moment I sincerely give myself to Him, I stand in a new relationship to Him. The atonement of His Son covers my guilt ; the blood of His Son cleanses my sin ; the Spirit helpeth my infirmities ; his almighty arm is pledged to support me here, and to lift me to heaven hereafter. As the act of consecration is entire, the realization of acceptance is clear, and joy and peace will flow into the soul. My friends, you may sometimes be inclined to ask why your religion furnishes you so little enjoyment. One frequent, perhaps general, cause is a want of a covenant to be the Lord's. When a man has bound himself by solemn obligation to be the Lord's, the first feeling may be one of awful solemnity ; but as he rests on the promises, the solemnity is mingled with deepest joy as he realizes the wealth of an inheritance which eye hath not seen nor ear heard. The blessed Spirit will show him the treasures, the

riches of the saints, even as he himself had not before realized. If there was joy when the woman had found one of the pieces of silver she had lost, surely there will be joy when a man finds that priceless treasure, salvation, which he had lost—a treasure he now finds to be, even in this world, more valuable than he had conceived it to be. Then with the feeling that you are accepted you will feel that you have a freedom of access to God's throne you before had not; the freedom a child has in approaching its father. A servant may approach a master with fear, but a child will approach a father with confidence. With this feeling of confidence in approaching God, comes a feeling of quiet trust not before enjoyed, and with this trust comes rest. "The Lord gave them rest." So gives He the Christian rest from many a troublesome foe. If you would know what deep soul rest is, then enter into covenant with God.

Not alone to professed Christians do I speak. There are others to whom I would speak. The terms on which God will enter into covenant with you are known. The offer still stands open. Who this night, without reservation, will enter into covenant relationship with God—take upon himself the obligation, not in his own strength, but in the strength of the Lord?

If your names are not found there at last,
you have neither part nor lot in the matter.
I invite you seriously to come to-night. Come,
and let us give ourselves to the Lord in an
everlasting covenant.

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II.

A New Year's Sermon.

"So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."—*Psalms* xc. 12.

WHAT schoolboy has not written or tried to write an essay on Time? The brevity, and uncertainty of time are so frequently dwelt upon that they seem trite; yet, after all, there is reason to fear most of us are not influenced by these truths as we should be. In these days of rapid and improved means of travel, a man may be hurried across a continent almost without realizing he has been travelling at all. Dining at a table, sleeping in his palace car, conversing with companions, reading the newspaper, miles of space may whirl past almost unnoticed. Let him look out at objects as they go sweeping by—let him take out his guide-book, search the position on the line of the last station he heard called, then he will begin to realize that he has been hurried thousands of miles from home and friends. We, my friends, are sailing on the current of the rapid

stream we call "Time." It flows from the ocean of an eternal past to the ocean of an eternal future. With some of us the bark glides so smoothly along with the swift current that we scarcely realize that we are being hurried away. To some of us life's engagements are so pressing—attending to our business, supplying the wants of our household—we forget at times that we are being swept onward by the flood. In the quiet of the last Sabbath evening of the year let us, so to speak, take out our guide-books and note how far along life's journey we have travelled. There is something almost awful in the thought of our world—this globe on which we live—rushing through space at the rate of hundreds of miles every minute, and of hundreds of millions of miles every year. To the watchers above our world contains a grander and more awful spectacle. There are millions of beings, each having in himself a world more valuable than the world on which we live, and each hurrying toward an eternal destiny of happiness or misery. That our thoughts may not degenerate into mere sentiment, it is well to have them solemnized and stimulated by the thought of the awful eternity toward which we are hurrying, and the priceless treasure we carry within us. We have almost crossed that portion of

our lives men call 1877. Thirty-three such portions make the average of human life—seventy make the allotted age. Some of us have almost reached the average, and almost half the allotted age. Some have gone far beyond the average, and are almost at the end. Some are just commencing. Time is of uncertain length to each of us. How many never reach the average! How few reach the allotted age! Go back to boyhood. How short the time seems, and yet how numerous the changes! Where are our boyhood's playmates? Where are those who played with us when young? And if the changes appear so great to us, what must they seem to one who has passed threescore years and ten? This is called a psalm of Moses, the man of God—generally supposed to be Moses, the law-giver. He seems to have been musing on the transitory nature of things earthly. He was an old man. Perhaps he had been reviewing the scenes of his life. He had thought of the royal family of Pharaoh, with whom he had been brought up, and was doubtless familiar. They have long since sunk as lead in the mighty waters. He thought of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and many others who were his contemporaries, who had stood by his side, and had started with him for the promised land; but they and well-nigh all that generation have

passed away, consumed by the wrath of the Almighty. He thought of the generations rising, each with its bright hopes and large ambitions, and each cut down with little of its hopes realized and few of its plans executed. They appear like the grass which groweth up. Life seems like a dream when one awaketh—as a tale that is told—as a watch in the night. Then, with this fleeting life, he contrasts the eternity of his God, and he sings: "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or even thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God."

The influence with some is to sadden. As they think of the uncertainty, the unproductiveness of life, they grow gloomy and despondent. It paralyzes. Our view of the brevity of life has had an injurious effect if it has only done that for us. There is a great deal of gloomy sentiment, floating in the name of poetry, that only enervates. If our meditation only does that, we had better turn from it. Life here is short, uncertain, and disappointing if taken alone; but God's word views it not alone, but in connection with another.

There are two influences which meditation of this kind usually has on men of this world.

The conclusion of one class is expressed by the Apostle: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Let us drown all thought of the shortness and uncertainty of life by a mad delirium of pleasure. There are many reckless prodigals whose lives seem one constant effort to drown sorrow—to make the most of the life that now is by living only for its enjoyments. One such life and its consequences is vividly painted by the greatest English poet of our times. He describes to us one who has chosen pleasure as his portion. First entranced, then enslaved, he plunges into the wildest vortex of pleasure. Like a madman whose boat has been caught in the rapids, he adds to the force of the current by rowing downward toward the cataract. He goads the swift courser, Time. Very soon he has reached a premature old age. He is a gap-toothed, grey-haired old man, and still we hear him, in his midnight revelries, madly singing—

"Fill the cup and fill the can,
Have a rouse before the morn—
Every moment dies a man,
Every moment one is born."

"Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

My friends, few, I trust, of us go so far, yet there are more who are making that really

their motto than suspect it. If you try to drive away serious thoughts by light reading, by light company—if you say, “Oh, well, life is short and uncertain, but let us have as much enjoyment of this world as possible”—if you think that the wisest thing a man can do is just to enjoy the present, then you are of that class, even if you do not plunge into wild excesses. But you say it is a law of our natures that we must seek enjoyment. Yes; but it is a law of our nature, made clear by human experience and by God’s word, that he who seeks only for present enjoyment soonest exhausts his inheritance of happiness, and has far the least of it. Have it now if you will, but remember there will be little of it. It will soon be past, and will leave a sting behind. You are not numbering your days aright if a consideration of the brevity of time leads you more eagerly to drink of every offered cup of pleasure. The young man who, says “I care nothing for an education; I care nothing for learning a useful trade; I mean to drink of pleasure, to have a good time”—will soon get to the dregs. The good time will soon pass. He will be in life a useless vagabond, and come down to an old age of poverty and disgrace. Even if there were no world beyond, wisdom would teach us moderation in the enjoyments of this world.

The elder son who lived at home and managed his estate, got more real enjoyment from the simple pleasures of home, and the sense of contentment which almost always comes from constant employment and an easy conscience, than his prodigal brother did in the fevered, spasmodic draughts of his life of riot; and beside, he spared himself the sting of remorse—the poverty and disgrace of the brother. He is so numbering his days as to apply his heart unto madness and folly who lives for present enjoyment only. My friends, there is too much epicurean sentiment about most of us in this age. The cry of old and young is for present enjoyment, and in our very eagerness we squander more than we get. We are frequently cheated out of it after we have paid the price. Surely, when we think of the eternal future, with its exhaustless store of happiness or misery, present enjoyment or present suffering is of little account if we may but grasp the eternal happiness and escape the eternal pain. “No matter which our thoughts employ.” My friends, it is only when we combine with the thought of the fleeting nature of things present, the thought that this fleeting present is a preparation for an endless future, that it has a beneficial influence. If I merely told you of the fleeting, unsatisfactory nature of the present, you might take

your choice and indulge in gloomy sentiment, and relax all effort, or you might plunge wildly into sin; but when I come and tell you that this life, though short, is endless in its influence, you ought to feel that this fleeting life is too important to be squandered in mere fleeting pleasures, and that you have no time for gloom. It should teach us that while much that we do here seems unimportant, yet the smallest act is clothed with measureless importance because of its influence on an eternal life. It should teach us to hoard our moments as we would golden sands.

I need not tell you that the wisdom to which the Psalmist would apply his heart is not the wisdom of this world—not a knowledge of science, important as it may be. It consists in a knowledge and application to our own lives of the truths that God's word reveals—truths that relate to the world that is to come. There is a distinction between knowledge and wisdom, which it will be well for us to remember here. Knowledge refers to truth stored in the intellect; wisdom, to truth used in the life. A man may have a great deal of knowledge, yet a very little wisdom. Wisdom is the right application of knowledge to a man's life. Many a man applies his intellect to the truth of God's word who does not apply his heart unto wis-

dom. Many a man may be a very good theologian but a very poor Christian. While we rejoice in the dissemination of the truths of God's word taking place through the various agencies used—while we recognize the importance of this, let us never forget that the application of those truths to the heart and life is vastly more important. You so number your days as to apply your hearts unto wisdom, when you take the truths you learn from the Bible from the sermons you hear, and apply them to your life. Here, my friends, we easily see whether we have been applying our hearts unto wisdom by asking ourselves have those great truths relating to salvation, with which from childhood we have been acquainted, had their designed influence on our lives. It is folly for a man to have in his intellect an important truth relating to his interests, and yet to refuse to be influenced by that truth. It is the extreme of folly for a man to go in direct opposition to the truth he holds. If a man knows that a certain manner of investing his funds will lead to ruin, and yet persists in that way, it is the height of folly from a financial standpoint. If a man knows that a certain manner of living produces ill-health, it is the height of folly, from a sanitary point of view, for him to persist in that course. If a man holds the truth that a certain

course of living leads to spiritual ruin, yet persists in that course, surely it is the height of folly spiritually. Yet, my friends, can I not justly charge many of you with that folly? Are there not many in this congregation who hold the great fundamental truths of Christianity with as firm and intellectual faith as I do, yet are influenced by the truths they hold but to a very little extent? Men in spiritual things manifest frequently a folly which never marks them in the affairs of this world. "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." Will you follow me while I briefly refer to truths we all hold with the strongest conviction, and ask how far have those truths been influential in our lives? Thus we may know whether we have applied our hearts unto wisdom in the past. We all believe in the atonement of Jesus. We all believe that the steps by which the benefits of that atonement are secured to us as individuals are repentance and faith. We all understand by repentance a godly sorrow for sin, which manifests itself in the abandonment of sin—confession of sin—humbling ourselves on account of it. Let me ask, Have you applied your hearts unto wisdom by the application of that knowledge you have had of the nature of repentance, ever since a boy or girl in the Sabbath-school, to

your own lives? Believing it essential to salvation, have you, before your God at least, confessed; have you humbled yourself; have you given it up; have you shaken it off as a poisonous viper that was clinging to you; have you given it up when it seemed very pleasant and very lucrative? Or have you rolled it as a sweet morsel under your tongue? As a physician finds it necessary sometimes to probe a wound to cleanse it, so would I with searching questions probe your consciences. I do it not to pain, but to prepare you for a cure. An evil that is cloaked is an evil that will not be healed. What I ask you I would ask myself. Let us sincerely ask for the light of the Spirit while we do it. Let us this last Sabbath evening pray, "Search us, O Lord." Run your eye back over the days of the year, and as far as memory calls up the past, ask how far has my knowledge of the necessity of repentance influenced my life? Have I been holding this truth in unrighteousness? Have I been running in the face of a truth that has fastened itself firmly on my conscience? If so, then have you been applying your heart unto folly; and in view of the greatness of the interests involved, how great the folly! Have you taken the next step, and committed your soul in simple faith into the hands of its Redeemer? Or, believing in

His love to you, His power to save you, and your need of Him, have you gone on as though you knew nothing of Him? If so, your folly only appears the more manifest because of the knowledge you have; and, in view of the greatness of the interests involved, how great that folly! Again, there are many of you who believe as firmly as I that this life is the seed-time of a harvest that will be eternal—that “whatsoever a man soweth” in this world he shall reap in the world to come. Has that momentous truth had its influence in your lives? Or have you been sowing here what you know, according to the laws of your being, must yield only misery and pain in the world to come, if so, you have been applying your heart unto folly? Is it not strange that men should believe truths most firmly, that relate most intimately to their interests, and yet not be influenced by them—utterly ignored? It is something you will not find men doing with reference to anything else but salvation—with reference to nothing but salvation, the most important of all interests. Surely it would be better to be so unwise in reference to anything else. My friends, if your review of the past shows you that you have been holding truth intellectually which you have persistently been diametrically opposed to in your lives, your

own reason must condemn you. And while reason and conscience and the Word of God forbid it, it will be folly for you longer to pursue your course. As you calmly look at the matter this Sabbath evening, do you not see that it is the height of folly to go on thus? To-morrow, nay, to-night, commence to let the truth you hold influence your life. Offer the prayer of our text, "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." Commence now to apply the truth you have so long believed to yourself. Never for a single hour live directly contrary to your convictions. By the brevity of time—by its rapid, constant, noiseless flight—by its uncertainty—by the value of the soul, and the unending duration that awaits you, I urge the prayer of my text on your acceptance.

He does not wisely number his days who does not provide for the future as far as possible. The butterfly, flitting from flower to flower, enjoying the present, making no provision for the future, must perish the first chill autumn storm. The man who lives, as the saying goes, from hand to mouth—unless, as in the case of the Apostles, he has Divine warrant for his course—is acting equally unwisely, and will probably perish, or be fed by the hand of charity the first storm of adversity that blows.

So, spiritually, the man who makes no provision must perish when the winter of death comes. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard," is a reproof that is needed for the spiritual sluggard as well as the physical sluggard. Creatures not endowed with intellect—the little squirrel, the bee, the ant—as they provide for the future, preach a sermon to the spiritual sluggard. We cannot forecast the future, but the ordinary course of nature—the ordinary experience of man—may indicate with sufficient clearness what our need in the future, with reference to temporal things, will be; and while from nature we have but a dim light as to what our eternal need will be, God's word comes in and shows us clearly the kind of provision required—most clearly it teaches that our provision for the eternal future depends to some extent on ourselves. We are "to lay up for ourselves in store a good foundation against the time to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life." We are to provide ourselves bags that wax not old; a treasure in the heavens, where no thief approacheth nor moth corrupteth. God has most manifestly laid on us the responsibility of providing for the future. Of course the great provision has been made, but the appropriating to ourselves the benefits of that provision is a personal

matter. Men plead their ignorance, and puzzle themselves about many things it is not necessary for them to know. We are ignorant, but we have the light necessary; and if at last we are found not having used the light we had, how can we consistently complain that we had not more? Men plead their weakness, and take refuge in voluntary humility. We are weak, but God does not require more of us than we can perform.

Some of you are endeavouring to make provision. You have fled for refuge to the Rock of Ages; for supplies, to the exhaustless store. To you I say, "Hold fast to what you have attained, but still press on." Have you been a babe, needing constantly the care of the household of faith—needing to be treated carefully—to be supplied while you do nothing to get it for yourselves or others? Lay aside the things of childhood—commence to be a help instead of a hindrance. Every man who is saved himself, should begin to try to save others. Let us look again at the character of our Pattern. What features have we failed to copy? His self-sacrifice—constant devotion for others? In the years to come, if spared, we will meet with opportunities of doing something for others. Encouragement, warning, sympathy

will be needed. Let us be prepared to give them. Be on the watch for opportunities of usefulness. We ought to rescue others. Let us watch for souls intelligently, prayerfully, constantly—as those that must give an account. He who is most anxious about others is likely to be the safest himself.

The new year will have trial and temptation for us. Perhaps great trial—great temptation. He is a wise man who provides not only for the ordinary experiences of the future, but, as far as possible, for its exigencies. The charmer may charm more sweetly, the tempter may smile more blandly, the siren song may be more melodious than ever before; you may, if not careful, find yourself in love with what before you loathed, and inclined to do what before you despised. Temptation may put on the stern look of necessity. In the battle of life, supplying your own wants and perhaps those of others—driven by force of example—driven by the close competition of these days—driven by your business difficulties—driven by your own wants—driven, perhaps, by the needs of those whose sustenance nature has placed upon you—you may seem almost, yet only almost, forced to do what conscience and God's word condemn; as, if conscience is not kept awake, temptation

to your dimmed moral vision may assume the form even of duty; nay, say to you, as it did on another occasion, "Command that these stones be made bread." You are brought into difficulties you could not avoid—necessity knows no law. Cut your way through as best you can. Well it will be for you if, as Christ did, you can fall back on the word of the Lord, which is tried. You are not making a right use of your time unless you are accumulating force for the trial. Because men think it wise to provide, as far as possible, for sudden disaster, which experience shows to be possible, a kind of business has sprung up and flourishes in our day, almost unknown a hundred years ago. Men know that it is possible some kind of property may be destroyed by fire, and they insure against fire. As a consequence, cities may be burned up, and in a few weeks, as if by magic, new and improved cities spring up from their ashes. Men have their property devoured by the hungry flames, and yet are not impoverished. Men know that their lives are in danger; they may be suddenly cut down; wife and children may be left to the charities of a heartless world—so they insure their lives; and many a time they have placed their families in better circum-

stances after their death than they could ever have hoped to do during their lives. Without entering into a discussion of some questions that may arise, we at least must commend the principle that underlies all this—a desire to provide, as far as possible, for the exigencies of the future. That country is most likely to have peace that is best prepared for war; so, spiritually, keep your armour bright. Make yourself skilful in the use of the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Keep yourself as a man of God, “thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” Above all, by prayer, keep open the communication between yourself and the Captain of your salvation. Let Him direct your steps, and you will not be led into the snares of the adversary. If He does permit you to be assailed, He will strengthen you for the onset. With Jesus, with God on your side, you have on your side Omnipotent power. It is astonishing, how a vessel may sail through the storm when she has been prepared for it. The winds that howl through the rigging may be singing the requiem of whole crews that have gone down from other ships, but no dirge is needed in her. The angry waves that beat against her side may have swallowed whole crews from other ships, but not a corpse from

hers. So with spiritual storms. Let the gales of temptation blow through a community, or the storm of persecution beat against a Church, the man who has been preparing, the house built on the Rock, will stand. How many a man, who has hoarded for years for old age or a stormy day, loses the hoardings of years in some financial crisis! How disheartening! But what loss is comparable with the loss of a soul? He is doing a safe business who so manages his affairs that any day he can settle up his affairs and pay every creditor. He who is not so managing is not doing a safe business. Good intentions cannot take the place of safe principle. Some sudden disaster may happen and overturn all his calculations. My friends, if it is hazardous in the comparatively trivial affairs of this world, it surely is with reference to eternal things; and risk, where infinite value is at stake, is risk of infinite loss. Where so much care is taken of temporal interests, he only applies his heart unto wisdom; who guards with equal—yea, greater—care his eternal interests. You have insured your property—you boast that any day you could close your business and pay all your debts. Are you managing your spiritual affairs as wisely? It may be during this year some day a messenger will come for you, and will say: "Render an ac-

count of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward." Have you your account ready? Has the debt been cancelled?

Is there weight in the considerations I present? Will they lead any to "so number their days that they may apply their hearts unto wisdom;" or will we leave this house feeling it has been but a reiteration of old truths—a presentation of claims you have learned too well to put aside?

III.

The New Birth.

“Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.”—*John* iii. 7.

WE read, “There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; the same came to Jesus by night.” The reason for his coming by night is generally supposed to be fear of man. It perhaps is as reasonable—it certainly is as charitable—to suppose that he came by night because he would then have a better opportunity for conversing with the Master when the multitudes had retired, and Jesus was alone. He seems to have been convinced of the divinity of the mission of Jesus. “We know that thou art a teacher come from God.” He does not, however, seem to have had a belief at this time in his Messiahship, or if he had he seems to have had a mistaken notion of the object of the Messiah in coming into the world. Nicodemus seemed to think the great need of the Jews was light—knowledge—and that the great work of Christ was to give that

light—"Thou art a teacher." Christ at once struck at the root of the error—"Ye must be born again." There is a deeper need than the need of light—the need of life. There is more important work than the enlightening of the judgment—the renewing of the heart. Men to-day are falling into the same mistake. The cry is Light! light! give us light! And it is well. Yet they need to be reminded of a deeper need—the need of life. "Ye must be born again." If a man was able to unravel all the mysteries, with reference to religious subjects, that perplex men, without the new life it would profit him nothing. On the contrary, if a man has this he may have very little knowledge, yet it matters little. Our Lord here drew the attention of Nicodemus to one of the most important truths of revelation—a truth that guards the way to the kingdom of heaven, as the flaming sword of old guarded the way to the tree of life. This is an obstruction Nicodemus had not expected to meet with. He had perhaps grown grey in the observance of Jewish rites and ceremonies, never suspecting that anything more was necessary. Now the truth flashes across his mind, he has been mistaken on the most important of all subjects. Startled, he inquires, "*How can* these things be?" If there is anything will startle a man, it is to find that

the hopes of a lifetime have been built on the sand. The deep spirituality of God's law is something we are all too apt to forget. Men are satisfied with a religion of forms. God looks at the heart. The truth, "*Ye must be born again,*" needs constant iteration in our ears. The change here spoken of is, (1) a necessary change, (2) a mysterious change, (3) a manifest change.

I. *Necessary.* "*Ye must*"—"verily, verily"—intimating not only that it is a truth of great importance, but also giving emphasis to the certainty of that truth. Although not referred to in exactly these terms, yet it is referred to and insisted on in other terms in various parts of the word of God. In the Acts of the Apostles, we hear Peter exhorting the people to repent and be converted, referring to this change. Paul to the Romans speaks of Christians as "being dead with Christ," "walking after the spirit," as having the "old man crucified." To the Corinthians he speaks of Christians as "new creatures in Christ Jesus;" to the Galatians, as those who had "received the adoption of sons;" to the Ephesians, as "being quickened," made alive, "who were dead in trespasses and sins;" to the Colossians, as being "risen with Christ," "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of

his dear Son." In Titus he speaks of Christians as being "saved by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." In Peter's Epistle he speaks of Christians as "begotten again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." In John, Christians are said to have "passed from death unto life."

The ground for this necessity is found in the doctrine of the "fall." "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," said God. Man ate. As a consequence, he died spiritually. When our Saviour says, "Ye must be born again," he simply says the life you lost must be reintroduced—the image of God must be restamped—the soul must be new-modelled, made again a "habitation of God through the Spirit." *The honour* of the divine government requires it. If the work of God in the soul of man has been laid in ruins by Satan, can God reinstate man in his lost position until the ruin has been rebuilt? To allow this would be to allow Satan to triumph. If, as a consequence of the withdrawal of the spiritual life, man became alienated from God, can he be allowed the position of a loyal subject while he has a rebel's heart? The ceremonies of the Jewish priesthood, the teachings of the Old Testament scriptures, ought to teach the necessity of this

change. Our Saviour justly asks of Nicodemus, "Art thou a teacher in Israel and knowest not these things?" The *justice* of the divine government requires it. If the angels were banished from heaven because of sin, can God admit man while remaining in sin into heaven? The *holiness* of God requires it. Can God, a holy Being, admit man, in destitution of holiness and polluted by sin, into heaven? The *divine wisdom* requires it. Would it be wise to admit one morally diseased to the pure atmosphere of the New Jerusalem? Could it then be said of heaven, "There the inhabitants never complain that they are sick," if moral disease was permitted to enter? God designs heaven as a place of freedom from all sorrow. Would it be wise to admit the source of all sorrow—sin—there? *The truth of God* requires it. The fiat has gone forth, "Except," etc. God is not a man that he should lie. *All the attributes* of the Godhead require it. Some persons speak of mercy in a way that would array it against all the other attributes. Justice must bend—holiness must be tarnished—truth must be laid aside, to make a way for mercy. But no. The divine attributes are all in harmony. They all unite in closing the door against the unrenewed.

Again, *man's obedience* requires it. The per-

fect obedience God's law requires cannot be rendered without this change. Outward obedience, springing from wrong or imperfect motives, cannot be acceptable to God. *Man's happiness* requires it. Sin, when allowed its course, produces misery here. Sin and holiness are antagonistic principles. An unrenewed soul would be out of sympathy with the holiness of heaven—would be miserable where nothing but holiness prevailed. This is the wicket gate to heaven; there can be no other entrance. It is the passport to the promised land; it can have no substitute. Let this thought sink into our hearts—there is no heaven without the change. There is no favouritism shown here. Rich and poor are on the same level. To all alike the Master's words are, "Ye must be born again." Nicodemus, the law-abiding ruler; the moral, earnest, inquiring rich young man need it as much as Mary Magdalene or the thief on the cross.

II. *A mysterious change.* "Canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth." Looking at it from the merely human standpoint, it is mysterious as to the agent. We see many changes taking place among men around us, many of them beneficial, by the agency of natural causes. The intemperate become reformed, the profligate become virtuous, the rude

become refined. But this is such an entire change in the affections, and will as no natural or human agent can produce. In the word of God it is spoken of as a new creation. In the vegetable kindgom, man can cause to degenerate or to improve by cultivation. But he cannot change the species. The thorn cannot be made "to bring forth figs, nor the bramble bush grapes." So, amid all the changes in character among men, the alienation of heart from God can only be removed by a supernatural agent, the Holy Spirit. Multitudes of men since the days of the Saviour profess to have passed through the change wh'ch the Saviour here speaks of. Three theories might perhaps be advanced to account for the experience. It may be attributed to delusion; it may be allowed that a real change has taken place, but only as the result of natural causes; or it may be attributed to a direct act of the Divine Spirit.

As the result of persistent effort in the gradual formation of habits, men are able wonderfully to change their characters. Does the change through which many men have evidently passed arise in this way? The first objection to this is, that in multitudes of cases the change has been too sudden to admit of such a theory. Look at Saul of Tarsus. There is no striving

after this experience. On the contrary, all the force of a mighty will, all the powers of a well-trained intellect, are set against it. His life, like a mighty current, is rushing in one direction, when suddenly, with no time for the slow formation of habits that would be like a new channel for the current of his life, that current rushes just as impetuously in the opposite direction. Certainly no ordinary process could account for this change. Again, those who pursued the course which we have indicated of striving after this experience have found it unsuccessful. Look at Luther. Long and earnestly he strove, but to no purpose, until by an act of faith the Spirit's power was brought in.

Is this experience the result of a delusion? Men have been always liable to delusion—sometimes have been the dupes of very transparent delusion. But we notice that if a delusion, it has held a long sway over human minds. For eighteen hundred years it has been believed in. To-day, amid the disposition that prevails to eliminate the supernatural, it is believed in, not only as a possible experience, but is claimed as an actual experience by thousands. The length of time the characters of those who have professed forbids the theory. That thousands of men, of all ages, temperaments, position, climes,

for eighteen hundred years, should profess themselves to have had a certain experience, is surely a remarkable delusion. If a delusion, it has had a wonderfully beneficial influence. Delusions usually have a deleterious influence; but those communities where the belief in the necessity and possibility of this change is the strongest, furnish proof that it benefits men morally and socially. The beneficial results forbid us to think it a delusion.

Again, the permanency of the influence of the experience forbids us to attribute it to delusion. If we had been with onlookers on the day of Pentecost, and seen the apparent confusion, we might have joined in the assertion of others, "these men," etc., or "these men are mad." But when day after day and week after week has passed, and we find them still filled with love to one another and all men, meek under reproach, calm under trial, steadfast in the midst of difficulties, it is too much to attribute it to delusion. Excitement, delusion, does not have either such blessed or such permanent effect. If we had been at Damascus when Saul arrived—if we had heard him relate his strange experience, we might have said, It is the result of a fright, or of some accident, a stroke of lightning, etc. But as we follow him through succeeding years—see him most

earnestly pursuing a course directly opposite to his previous course—making herculean efforts to spread the faith he once despised in spite of the strongest opposition and criticism, that must again and again have forced him to look into his experience, and test the genuineness of the work, it is too much to attribute it to delusion. Some mightier power has reached the soul of Paul, and lifted him to a higher position and given him a new experience. There are many in the world to-day who claim the experience, and whose lives bear testimony to some real change. I might tell you of a Lincolnshire collier who has, with wonderful simplicity and candour, told the story of his conversion and previous life. He was an intemperate, violent man—one who frequently engaged in drunken brawls and fights—one who, as he acknowledges, once raised his own arm to strike his aged mother as she prayed for him. Conviction of sin seized the man; at length, as he prayed one day in a sand pit, he realized the change. From that time on, through years at least of his life, he was a reclaimed man. His temper among his fellows, his whole life showed the change. In describing the death of his child, he gives us a look into his home, and at the same time into his heart. Called suddenly from the mine one day, he finds his

child dying. As he stands beside her couch, the tears making furrows down his soot-begrimed cheeks, the little sufferer looks up and asks him to sing. So he struck up—

“ Here o’er the earth a stranger I roam ;
Here is no rest, is no rest.”

Then he breaks down, but the little one pleads with him to sing on. Again he commences—

“ Here are afflictions and trials severe,
Here we must part with the friends we hold dear.
Here is no rest.”

Again he breaks down, and again, urged by the dying child, sings of heaven and the happy meeting. As we think of the dying child who has evidently learned the way, of that father smoothing her dying pillow with songs of the better land, of his own tender feelings, we feel it is too blessed a change to attribute to delusion. Some mightier power has transformed that life, evoked those tender feelings, bound that family by such strong affections.

If we reject the agency of the Holy Spirit, it is a stream without a source—an effect without a cause. The Scriptures everywhere speak of it as the result of the Holy Spirit’s agency. Christ here speaks of being born of the Spirit. It is spoken of as the “renewing of the Holy Ghost.” He who moved on the face of the

deep when our earth was without form and void, when the materials from which our earth has been constructed lay in confusion, and formed our beautiful world, He it is who must move on the darkness and chaos of the unrenewed heart, and must breathe again the breath of life divine therein.

Then while we impress the necessity of the change, we would with equal earnestness impress the truth that only a divine agent can effect it. There is no heaven without the change—there is no change without the Spirit. You may work as earnestly as Wesley, and be as free from sin as Paul, who tells us that “touching the righteousness which is in the law he was blameless,” yet the power of the Spirit must be exerted to produce the change in you. We are fallen; only Almighty power can lift us. We are dead; only Almighty power can quicken us. No turning over a new leaf, no surface change will do. By earnest prayer, offered in strong faith in Jesus, we must look to God for the accomplishment of this work. But when the Agent is known, the manner of His operation remains a mystery. But though the manner is a mystery, the fact need not be in uncertainty. We notice it is—

III. *A manifest change.* We cannot perhaps know the origin of the wind, yet we need

have no doubt of its existence. We see it in the waving tree-top or in the fluttering leaf—we feel it as it fans our brow in the summer breeze, or freezes our blood in the winter storm—we hear it as it murmurs in the zephyr, or as it howls in the tempest. So, although we may not know the manner of the Spirit's operation, we may be assured of its reality. We may know it by the peace realized within, by the love that manifests itself in streams of benevolence, by the Spirit's cry heard in the soul—" *Abba, Father.*"

The change is manifest to the soul experiencing it, frequently at least, by the direct influence of the Spirit. God, who has given us hearing and sight and speech by which we can communicate with one another, has not left Himself without an avenue by which He can approach the human soul. The soul itself does not understand how, but in some way the soul feels assured the work is done. As a proof that this belief has scriptural support, listen to Paul: "We have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, *Abba, Father.*" Again, "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, *Abba, Father.*" To illustrate the truth from experience, let me refer you to the experience

of Mr. Wesley. Speaking of his conversion, he says: "In the evening I went to a meeting in Aldersgate Street, where our minister was reading Luther's preface to Paul's Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation, and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." Others have had a more remarkable experience; others, a less. To some the truth has come as the gradual dawning of the day; to others, as the sun bursting from behind a dark cloud. Mr. Spurgeon, in rising to preach one morning, some years ago, said: "Six years ago as nearly as possible, at this very hour, I entered a place of worship. The minister arose and announced the text I have announced, 'Look unto me and be ye saved,' and that moment I looked."

Then, that the soul may not be deceived by mistaking some passing feeling for the witness of the Spirit, the inward witness is to be accompanied by fruit in the outward life. First, there is love, especially to the children of God. "By this," said Jesus, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love

one to another." "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." It will show itself in delight in prayer and a more conscious communion with God. By power over sin: "He that is born of God overcometh the world." By constant effort after purity: "He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." It will show itself in subjection to God.

By these and other marks may we know whether we have been born again. We believe it is the privilege of all God's people to have a satisfactory experience. But we must earnestly make use of the means by which God reveals Himself—prayer—the study of His word. How many live in careless uncertainty on this point! How few have a clear evidence! How indifferent men are! If a title to an earthly estate were in dispute, what anxiety, what effort to have the matter made clear! Yet men are content to leave eternity in awful suspense! Are there not many who are not in suspense or uncertainty, but feel sure they have not passed from death unto life, yet are careless? With danger near which they clearly see, and a refuge near which they can reach, they refuse to fly.

Great as is the need, mysterious as is the change, the means to be employed are simple.

Our Lord does not close His discourse with Nicodemus without pointing them out. "As Moses," etc. Could there be a simpler means of cure for the serpent-bitten Israelite? Could there be a simpler for the sin-stricken soul? Though the pulse has grown feeble, and the life-current has almost ceased to flow, when the Israelite lifted his eye to the serpent, the pulse grew strong and the blood of health commenced to flow through the veins. So when the sinner looks with faith to Christ, the divine life is reimparted. Repent and believe. Cast away your sins and come to Christ, and He, the great fount of life, will impart it to you.

IV.

The Law of Revivals.

“O Lord, revive thy work.”—*Heb.* iii. 2.

THE prophet Habakkuk has in a previous chapter been predicting the judgments about to descend on God's ancient people, because of their sins and departures from God. The Chaldeans were to come and spread desolation through the land. After uttering the inspired prediction, he himself seems alarmed at the terribleness of the calamity about to overtake the people, and he raises his heart in application to God that He would mingle mercy with judgment. “O Lord, I have heard thy *speech* and was afraid: O Lord, revive thy work, in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.’ Without stopping further to notice the connection in which the words occur, let us proceed at once to see how far this prayer is suitable to ourselves.

I. What is a revival? It is important that we should have as clear ideas as possible of the

blessings for which we ask, that it may not be said of us, "Ye know not what ye ask." As Methodists, we have been so much in the habit of holding revivals in connection with special efforts of one kind or another, that they have come to be regarded merely as one and the same thing. When we think of a revival, we think of a special effort. It is true, indeed, that these seasons of effort have been in scores of instances seasons of revival, or means of promoting a revival. When God's people have laid aside their ordinary avocations, and for days or weeks made the promotion of his work their great aim, the Head of the Church has again and again been pleased to accept the sacrifice—the Holy Spirit has been poured out from on high, and sinners have been converted, and believers have been built up. Such results have followed—such results will, we doubt not, continue to follow these efforts. But blessed as they have been, honoured as they still are, we think it an erroneous and an injurious idea to suppose that we cannot have a revival except in connection with these. Such an idea tends to weaken the faith of God's people in the ordinary means of grace. Now, we should look for and expect God's blessing in connection with the ordinary as well as in connection with extraordinary means. These as well as the others may be made means of pro-

moting revivals. It was so in the early history of our Church. God's Spirit came down in connection with nearly every ordinary mean—and sinners were converted, and believers were sanctified, and the work went steadily on. Is this not one reason why the ordinary means are not more useful? We seem to act as though nothing could be done except in connection with special means. Christians seem to suppose that the only time Satan's kingdom can be invaded is while special means are being used—during four or five weeks in the year, or four or five weeks in four or five years. During the rest of the time Satan is suffered too much to keep his goods in peace. The Church grows cold, some backslide—sinners go their way to death—still we do but little, and seem to think but little can be done until a special effort. It is not as though the farmer should, after four or five weeks of arduous toil in the spring-time putting in his grain, neglect to take care of them. Weeds might grow, fences be blown down, cattle might trample on his grain, meanwhile he would look on with folded arms, and perhaps lament the desolation, but do nothing until the time to make a special effort again. Would it not be better constantly to look for the reviving influence of the Holy Spirit? I do not speak against special efforts. As I have

already said, they have been and still are honoured by God, and what God honours we should be careful not to condemn. (1) I believe we still should engage in such efforts, and do so heartily; but we should be careful not to depend too much to them—not to allow dependence on them to lead to neglect of the ordinary—not to think that they are absolutely necessary to a revival. There have been special means without a revival—there have been revivals without the special means. Why is it that we so seldom see persons uniting with us except in connection with such means? Is it not partly because persons think they are only welcome at such times? The doors of the church on earth, like the gates of the New Jerusalem, should be kept constantly open. Some, again, have erroneous notions about the essential characteristics of a revival. Some think all enthusiasm and excitement are out of place in connection with religion. Such persons would do well to remember the day of Pentecost, when onlookers said “these men are full of new wine”—so great was the apparent confusion. Others, again, seem to think that order and decorum are incompatible with a true revival. Such would do well to remember when Elijah was in the mount. There was an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake; there was a fire, but God was not

in the fire ; there was a wind, but the Lord was not in the wind ; there was a still small voice, and it was so that God was in the voice. Let us not then attempt to dictate to the Holy Spirit as to the way in which he shall manifest Himself ; let us rather pray, Send by whom thou wilt ; send as thou wilt ; but " O Lord, revive thy work." Thus far, however, we have rather spoken of what a revival is not, than of what it is. What is a revival ? To revive means to call back to life, to reanimate, to rouse, to refresh. By nature we are all dead in trespasses and sins. Now, when one such dead soul is brought back to spiritual life—in other words, when one is born again—that is, in the truest and best sense of the word, a revival. Even if it goes no further, it is a revival. Again, to revive means to rouse or to refresh one who is weary or faint. When a Christian who has become weary in well-doing—cold, lukewarm—has his love rekindled, his zeal again inflamed, that is, to him at least, a revival. Some of you have felt many such revivals, I doubt not. You can remember when in heart, if not in life, you were returning again to the world—the warmth and glow of spiritual life was well-nigh gone, but, by the influence of the blessed Spirit, in some way you were led to see the dangerous condition into which you were relapsing, and in answer to your

earnest prayers, your zeal and love have been rekindled—the things that were ready to die have been strengthened—you have been revived. But by a revival we generally refer to something more extensive than this. We generally refer to a time when there is a greater interest than usual in spiritual things throughout an entire community—when many sinners are converted—when believers are sanctified—when, in connection with the services of the sanctuary,—

“Heaven comes down our souls to meet,
And glory crowns the mercy-seat,”—

when religion seems the common topic of conversation. But whether it is the conversion of one sinner, or the quickening of one believer, or the general awakening of a whole community, that which is essential in every case is the presence of the Holy Spirit. A revival is an influence of the Holy Spirit producing more of the life of God in the soul of man. What I wish especially to emphasize is the need of the presence of the Spirit. Without this we may have all the outward evidences of a revival, but we cannot really have a revival. When the Spirit is present, producing the results I have referred to, it is a revival, whatever may be the attendant circumstances. It is a revival,

whether it take place in the grand cathedral of the city or in the log school-house of the back-woods—whether at the little fireside prayer-meeting or among vast multitudes in the leafy groves—whether it comes as a still small voice or as a rushing mighty wind—whether the people are filled with

“The solemn awe that dares not move,
And all the silent heaven of love,”

or there is a shout as of a King in the camp. Then, when we pray for a revival, let us pray for a downshedding of the Holy Ghost. Let us lay aside all preconceived notions as to the way in which the work shall take place. It may be that to humble our pride the Spirit will manifest itself in ways and through means which we had not anticipated; for God frequently uses the weak and foolish and despised things of the world to humble the pride of man.

II. Do we need a revival? This we regard as an important question, for the earnestness with which we ask for any blessing is usually proportioned to our realization of need. If we are but little impressed with our need, we will be but little in earnest in asking. If we are deeply impressed with our need, we will be earnest in asking. First, we say the whole Church needs a revival. There never was a

time when the operations of the Church were carried on on a vaster scale than at present. Missionary Societies, Tract Societies, various organizations in connection with the Church, are manifesting a zeal such as the world has not before seen, and doubtless much good is being accomplished. Far be it from us to disparage or undervalue the work thus done. Still, the question forces itself upon us, are the results as great as we would have been led to expect considering the means used? The success of all this vast machinery depends on the presence of the Spirit. All these organizations need to be permeated by the influence of the blessed Spirit. The Church in all its divisions needs to be baptized by the Spirit, and clothed with power from on high. Then will she appear fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners. The different branches of the Christian Church need a revival, a downshedding of the Spirit, that they may be prepared to work together harmoniously in the great work of human evangelization. When love to God becomes the ruling principle in either Churches or individuals, minor differences disappear, and they are enabled to see their essential oneness. The bond which is to unite all Christians in one great brotherhood is, it appears to me, not to be a common name, or a common

Church government or organization, but their common love for a common Saviour. I say, in proportion as the Churches are baptized with the spirit of love, will they be led to see their essential unity. The whole Church needs a revival, as a reproof to the spirit of scepticism that is abroad in the world. We have proof ample that Christianity is not a cunningly devised fable—proof so ample as to stamp unbelief with the character of perversity. Nevertheless, the world needs proof—may we not say the world has a right to demand proof?—not only that the Divine presence was with the Church at its establishment, but also that we still have that presence. These are times in which men are disposed to take very little for granted. Now, it seems to me that genuine revivals, both in the circumstances that attend them and in the consequences that flow from them, are among the strongest proofs we have of the Divine presence. The standard of morality among professed Christians of the present day, is not as much in advance of the morality of the world as it should be. In order that the Church may retain her power over the consciences of men, she must maintain a higher standard than that of the world. This standard must be seen not only in her creeds, but also in the lives of her professors ; and in order

that men may be raised above the world they need a revival. But do not we, as one branch of the Church of Christ on earth, need a revival? While encouraging progress has been made, and is still being made in many respects—while the number of our Church edifices, and their costliness, is steadily increasing—while the liberality of our people is commendable, it is still a grave question whether we have the same marked evidence of the Divine presence with us that our fathers enjoyed. Are conversions as frequent? Are experiences as clear? Do the same Divine influences and holy joy accompany us in our various means of grace? It seems to me that as a Church we are peculiarly dependent on the influence of the Spirit. Many of our distinctive peculiarities are built, if I may so speak, on the idea that the Spirit is present with us. Our class-meetings, our fellowship-meetings, become insipid, positively distasteful to us, if we lose the presence of the Spirit. When the Holy Spirit has departed from a Church, you may write "Ichabod" on her walls—the glory has departed. All the outward signs of prosperity may be there, but the life is gone. She is like a body without a soul. Instead of being a living organism sending forth healthful influences, she becomes a noisome carcase sending forth

malaria and death. Have we not, in the past history of the Church, melancholy proof of this? She has at times become corrupt both in doctrine and practice, till her influence has been seemingly hurtful rather than beneficial. She has been at times only an instrument in the hands of designing men for promoting their own selfish and unhallowed schemes. But as an individual Church we need a revival. Death, removals, backsliding, will constantly decimate the ranks of any Church, unless in some way the ranks are being filled up. Additions to our ranks without the influences of the Holy Spirit moving those who unite with us, are not to be sought. They will diminish rather than increase our power. But let us inquire, with reference to ourselves as individuals, do we not need revivals? There are sometimes persons who attend our services, who are openly wicked and profane. Usually, such persons are only reached by an extraordinary outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In order that these may be saved, we need a revival. Then there is a large and very important class of persons who are half decided, almost persuaded to be Christians. Brought up in Christian families, in the Christian Sabbath-school, they linger around the outskirts of the Church, feeling an attachment to its institutions, an interest in its progress, and

yet, not one with us. They may be amiable, moral, may contribute to the funds of the Church; but still, while our Saviour's words, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of heaven," remain unrepealed, they need something more. The very interest they manifest in the cause of Christ only places us under greater obligation to try and lead them to the Saviour. Much as we may desire to have them with us, it is still more important that they should be born again; and in order to this, they need a revival at least in their own hearts. Then there are formal Church members—persons who do not enjoy religion. Many such, it is to be feared, are with us; and while we welcome to our fold all who desire to flee from the wrath to come, converted or unconverted, yet these are not as useful as they might be; they are not happy, they are not safe unless they are born again. Then I trust there are some in all our congregations who enjoy religion. Do not these need a revival? Ah! how many of these have to say "it is not with me as it once was." Then the ministry—do not they need it? Oh, I think they of all men, if they are men of God, will pray, "O Lord, revive thy work." They need more than anything else the constant influence of the Holy Spirit to accompany them. Without this, no

matter how eloquent, how learned, they will be but as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. With this, how often have the simple utterances of unlettered men come with mighty power! But where is there one that does not need a revival? The young need it, that they may be prepared for life's temptations; the old need it, that with Simeon they may say, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation;" the people need it, that they may keep their garments white amid a world of pollution; the ministry need it, that their lips may be touched with a live coal from off the holy altar, and utter words of burning energy; the Church needs it, to equip her for the war; the world needs it, to prepare them for judgment. Do you feel your need? If you do, from the depths of your burdened spirit let the cry go up, "O Lord, revive thy work."

III. Can we have a revival? This, it seems to me, is an important question; for our earnestness in asking depends not merely on our sense of need, but also on our probability of obtaining. If we have but little probability of obtaining, we are apt to have but little faith or earnestness in asking. There are some blessings for which we must ask conditionally. We know not whether God will see fit to bestow them or not. Some persons seem to suppose a revival of

religion is of this class ; some even seem to suppose that the causes that lead to a revival are fluctuating and uncertain—sometimes they will act, sometimes not. Such ideas are dishonouring to God, and greatly injurious to the faith of the Church. Remembering that we have defined a revival as a result of the operation of the Holy Spirit, we believe we can have a downshedding of the Spirit quickening themselves whenever they sincerely and earnestly desire it, and with faith ask for it.

“ If what I ask is good,
And suits the will divine,
By earth and hell in vain withstood—
I know it shall be mine.”

With reference to God's willingness to bestow the Spirit we have the strongest assurances of the word of God. “ If a son ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those that ask Him?” Then, as far as a revival of the work of God in the hearts of His people is concerned, they may have it at any time. The experience of God's people in this respect, in all ages, has verified the Saviour's promise. In reference to the ingathering and conversion of others, God will, in answer

to the prayers of His people, pour out His Spirit on these also ; but whether they yield to the influence of that Spirit, is a matter dependent on themselves. We believe God has given men the power of resisting the mightiest influences of the Spirit, but usually when God's people co-operate with His Spirit thus poured out in answer to their prayers, sinners will be converted as well as believers built up.

IV. *How shall we secure a revival?* God could doubtlessly, if He saw fit, carry on His work independently of human means. But He has seen fit to make His Church mainly the agency through which He acts in bringing the world unto Himself. As this is the case, much depends on the purity, the holiness of the Church. God will have a holy people, and very much in proportion to their holiness will be their usefulness. You remember, with reference to God's ancient people, that while they remained faithful to Him, they were constantly victorious ; their foes were driven like chaff before the wind ; but when they were unfaithful, became idolators, they were constantly defeated. Their cities all lay desolate ; their children wept in chains. We believe that just as in ancient times God refused to go out with His people, because of some departure from Him ; so now, because of unfaithfulness, or of some unrebuked sin in

connection with them, He has not blessed them with success in some efforts to promote His work. It is necessary that a revival shall commence with God's people. It is manifestly inconsistent for us to ask God to revive His work and convert sinners, while there is sin in connection with ourselves. God said to His ancient people, "My arm is not shortened that I cannot save, nor my ear heavy that I cannot hear; but your sins have separated between you and your God, and your iniquities have hidden His face from you." And has He not said the same to His Church in modern times? In times of religious dearth, people are inclined to doubt the Divine faithfulness; but we must remember it is His people that are failing in the fulfilment of the conditions, and not God failing in His promise. Then the first need is for prayer for the downshedding of the Spirit, purifying the hearts of God's people, and thus fitting them for His use. Then the love of God in the hearts of his people will be a mighty impelling power, leading them to go out to the highways and hedges of sin, to compel the people to come in. It is necessary that we should have our own hearts warmed before we are prepared to work. David seemed to have this in view when he prayed, "Restore unto me the joys of Thy salvation, and uphold me by

Thy free Spirit ; then will I teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee." In this work holiness is power ; and if we would be useful, we must be possessed of this power. This power in our own hearts is only secured by prayer. The Holy Spirit is only promised to those that ask for Him, and our prayers must be marked by earnestness. "In the day," etc. And our prayers must be accompanied by earnest effort.

Shall we have a revival ? We look back on the days of Pentecost, and we say, If I had lived in those days, I might have believed for a revival. We look forward to a good time coming, when the Spirit shall be poured out from on high, and think that if we live in those days we might pray with faith for a revival. But what reason have we to suppose that God was more willing to bless then than He is now ? What reason to suppose that He will be more willing in some future time ? What right to limit the Holy One of Israel, who changeth not ? Although, on account of the unfaithfulness of the people, proofs of the saving power of the Gospel are not as frequent as they should be, yet we have, even in our own days, proofs abundant of the mighty power of the Gospel. During the past year a revival of great extent and power has prevailed in Scot-

land, and thousands have been brought to Christ. The same earnestness and faith will secure the downshedding of the Spirit here. Oh! I am persuaded that the Church has a power in her hand greater almost than she realizes. But when the whole Church shakes herself from the dust—looses herself from the bands of her neck—puts on the whole armour of God—then her light shall break forth as the morning, and her health shine forth speedily; then she shall ride upon the high places of the earth; then she shall arise and shine; then revival, like mighty tidal waves, shall sweep over the earth, and the glory of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the great deep.

Confession of Sin.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”—
1 *John* i. 9.

NO other book, perhaps, presents a darker picture of what human nature is than the Bible does. Yet no other book presents a brighter picture of what human nature may become than the Bible does. It paints man as spiritually diseased in every part: “the whole head is sick, the whole heart is faint, and there is no soundness in us; nothing but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores.” It points us to a physician at whose rebuke disease will fly; who has but to speak the words, “I will, be thou clean,” and the leprous spots of sin will be purged; who can restore us to perfect soundness, so that we may at length be admitted into that city where the inhabitants never complain that they are sick either spiritually or physically, so that neither spot, nor wrinkle, or any such thing will be

found on us. Yes, his case is represented as worse than diseased—as spiritually dead, and rapidly passing from spiritual to eternal death. Death has passed on all men; in Adam all die. It points to a Saviour whose words once pierced the ears of death—at whose command the dead came forth. It tells us that His word can call us back to newness of life. We are debtors who have nothing to pay, in danger of being shut up in prison till we pay the uttermost farthing. Yet this book points us to One who has paid the debt, and it offers us a discharge on most reasonable conditions. We are sinking in the mire and the clay close by the dark river of death. The Bible points us to a throne where the light of God's countenance ever rests; to a crown of glory that fadeth not away; to garments pure and white, and says, "All these shall be thine if thou wilt obey my instructions." In our text we have a most gracious offer of God's mercy. On either side of it are very emphatic declarations of our sin. The eighth verse says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." The tenth, "If we say that we have not sinned we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." The rainbow seems the brighter, the darker the cloud against which it is hung. So the promise of

our text seems the sweeter because of the mournful words that stand on either side of it. The Gospel nowhere presents the folly of offering bread to those who are full, or medicine to those who are well. Its offers of help are mingled with its proofs of our helplessness. Its offers of pardon accompany proofs of our guilt; of safety, proofs of our danger. So here the offer of pardon and cleansing stands connected with proofs of our guilt and pollution.

I. *The condition*—"If we confess." The condition is most reasonable. A man who does not acknowledge his guilt is not prepared to appreciate a pardon. Go to one whom you feel has injured you, but who is not willing to acknowledge it, and tell him you pardon him, and he will laugh at you for your pains and tell you he does not need your pardon. So men are not prepared to receive the pardon of their sins till they are sorry for them and confess them. Here is the difficulty with the pardon of sinners. It is not the difficulty of procuring pardon for penitent transgressors, but the difficulty of getting men to become penitent—of getting men into a position where they would be prepared for forgiveness. Apparently, confession of sin is a very easy act, and an act very frequently performed. To one who

is really penitent it is easy; but because there are not many really penitent, it is not common. It must be evident that every kind of confession will not do. Let us try to separate the false from the true; the spurious from the genuine. There are three or four kinds of confession that are very commonly practised, yet which are not scriptural.

1st. There is the Romish. This duty of confession, like many others, has been wrested by the Romish Church to serve the purposes of a system. One of the means, as it seems to us, by which that Church is able to keep her followers in such abject submission is the confessional. You can scarcely place yourself under the power of another more completely than by making him acquainted with all the sins of your life. Our text, it may be, has been made to do service in support of the system; but we observe, there is not a word here of confession to a fellow-man. True, St. James says, "Confess your faults one to another;" but you observe it is mutual confession. There is no mention of one class to whom the confession is to be made. Probably, too, the faults referred to by St. James, and which are to be confessed, are wrongs committed against a fellow. If we have wronged another in his feelings, property, or reputation, it

is our duty to confess to him. It would have prevented many an unseemly quarrel had men done their duty in this respect. A false pride has frequently prevented men from doing it, even when they have been sorry for it. Many an unnatural quarrel has resulted from men being unwilling to acknowledge wrongs of this kind. That there may be circumstances in which it is the duty of a man to confess sin to his fellow, we admit; that there may be benefit in obtaining advice, we admit; but that God has made it the duty of one class to state in detail all their sin to another class, we regard as unscriptural. *It is wrong* in its object. The object of Romish confession is absolution or forgiveness, but we regard it as the prerogative of God only to forgive sin. *It is wrong* in its effect on both him who makes and him who hears the confession. It is an unnecessary act of humiliation before a fellow. It must engender an abject spirit in those who make it. It would place a power in the hands of the confessor over the confessing which few men can be safely trusted with. It must tend to engender pride in the confessor. He always sees others at a disadvantage. All their sins are uncovered to his gaze, while his are hidden from them. A man compelled to look constantly on the worst part of the lives of

even good men needs a great deal of grace indeed to resist the lowering tendency.

2nd. Then there is a *general confession*, which nearly all who dwell in Christian lands make, or are willing to make, when they acknowledge themselves sinners. This general confession of sinfulness from the lips of most men is not accompanied by humility. It is an excuse for sin—a palliation of sin—rather than a sorrow for it, or a purpose to give it up. The feeling, I fear, of many is that they are so much the less responsible for sin because they are sinners. The feeling is, “I have a fallen nature; it is therefore, no wonder if I sin, nor is it any reason for severe self-condemnation.” Such a confession, which serves to quiet the conscience and encourage a life of sin, is surely not the confession my text speaks of. It implies neither sorrow for sin, nor humiliation on account of it.

3rd. Then there is the *formal confession*—such as may be heard in the churches every Sabbath, and in which the congregations are supposed to join: “All we like sheep are gone astray;” “We have left undone the things which we ought to have done, and we have done the things which we ought not to have done;” “All our unrighteousness is as filthy rags,” etc. Now, such language, so far as our hearts enter into it, is good and proper. No

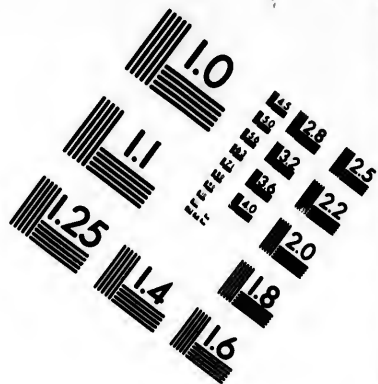
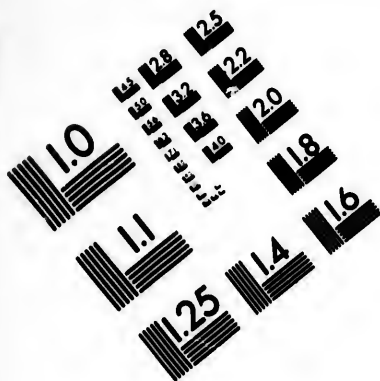
language can be more appropriate than the language of Scripture; but from the frequency of its repetition there is danger of our using them in a meaningless way. The expressions are useful so far as they afford a channel for the expression of our real feelings, but when they come to be used as a form, they serve to take the place of what might have been a useful, and of what is a most reasonable duty. We may join in these formal confessions without either sorrow for our sins or purpose of amendment. Mere formal confession cannot be what our text requires.

4th. There is what, for want of a better term, I may call the *apologetic confession*. There are many persons who have got into the habit of making what sound at first like very candid confessions, but lose all meaning, and lack the qualities of genuine confession, by being always coupled with an excuse or a palliation. Have you never heard one make a statement somewhat as follows: "I know I have an ungovernable temper. Under provocation I will fly into a passion. I am very sorry for it. It gives me a great deal of trouble, but I was not born with the meek disposition of some; and then one needs a little temper to be able to hold his own in this world." Really, they are as proud of their temper as a peacock of his colours.

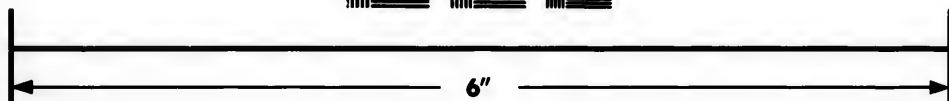
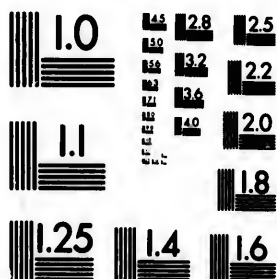
Again, you have heard a man say: "I have been very wild in my time. I have done a good many things that were not, to say the least, very pious; but every one must sow his wild oats." Or again, you have heard one say: "I confess I am pretty sharp in a bargain; but a man needs to be wide-awake if he is going to succeed. You must do as others do." (These are what we have termed apologetic confessions, and they are very common.) "I know I don't do right," says another, "but I own right up to it. I put the worst side out. I am not one of your canting hypocrites. If there is anything I hate, it is hypocrisy." The man imagines it is a virtue to make an avowal of wickedness while he continues to live in it. Because he has the boldness to flaunt his sins, and is not ashamed of them, he takes credit to himself for his candour. It may be candid, but it is sadly lacking in the qualities of humility and sorrow for sin. It may sound courageous; but while we think of Him against whom sin is an offence, the boldness assumes the form of impious daring. Instead of fitting for pardon, they only aggravate the guilt. They imply a blindness to the worst aspects of the case. A man never is disposed to speak lightly of his sins, or excuse them, when he makes genuine confession.

5th. *Genuine confession.* We have examples of genuine confession in the 32nd Psalm and also in the 51st, and in the cases of the prodigal and of the dying thief. Every *genuine* confession of sin implies at least an acknowledgment of God's right to rule. It may seem at first that that is a very simple matter, and that all would acknowledge God's right to rule. But there has been in all ages a disposition to dispute this right, or at least to circumscribe the region over which God has a right to rule. Sin is insubordination to the Divine government. Every man who is living in the habitual, wilful violation of the Divine law sets his own judgment, or his own desires, up against the Divine government. Genuine confession implies an acknowledgment of the absolute right of God to rule. If a man pleads evil tendencies, or the example of others, in excuse or palliation, he has not the conception of God's authority he ought to have. Sin is an attempt to be independent of God's government. Men have lived so long in sin, have so habitually set aside the authority that ought to have ruled them, that they are scarcely conscious how far they are from fulfilling the divine requirements. There is in men who live in sin a constant disposition to narrow the region over which religion rules—to lessen the restrictions.

The cry is for liberty. Many exclude God from much they do, and are scarcely conscious of it. Because in this way men scarcely realize how far the divine requirements extend, they in many things sin without compunction. Men are not prepared to confess sins where they do not realize that they have committed them. Then again, habitual violation of any law gradually weakens the sense of obligation. The habitual liar has not that sense of obligation to truthfulness which a veracious man has. The habitual swearer has not that sense of obligation to keep the command "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," that others have. The habitual thief or the habitual cheat gradually loses a sense of the obligation to honesty. There are numbers of men throughout even Christian lands that have lived in violation of nearly all the commands, yet who sleep soundly. Habitual transgression has weakened the sense of obligation. And what is a man's sense of obligation but his sense of the right God has to rule. Frequent violations of God's law, in any particular, gradually lead to a weakening of the conviction that God has a right to rule in that particular. Now, a man who has lost a conviction that God has a right to rule is not prepared to confess his sins, because confession



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of sin implies a conviction of God's right to rule.

Again, our sense of obligation to obey is weakened by our associations. "I am a man of unclean lips, and dwell among a people of unclean lips," said the prophet Isaiah; so we may say we are men of unclean hearts, and dwell among a people of unclean hearts. The customs, the opinions of men are tending to weaken our sense of obligation to God. You all know that to dwell where any sin is treated as a small matter, gradually leads to our regarding it as a small matter. The moral atmosphere we breathe is not calculated to strengthen our conviction of obligation to obey God. All these influences are at work, tending to weaken our sense of obligation to obey. Our sense of obligation to obey is the correlation of our sense of God's right to rule. Owing to all these causes, there are few men who have that deep conviction of the absolute right of God to rule they ought to have. The holiest man on earth has probably but a weak conviction of God's right to rule, compared with the conviction of those bright beings who surround His throne and wait to do His bidding. I repeat, confession of sin implies a conviction of God's right to rule; and because of these tendencies I have pointed out, there are multi-

tudes of men who have not this conviction to the degree necessary to confession. Our view of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and consequently our disposition to confess it, will depend on our sense of obligation to obey God, and our sense of obligation will correspond exactly with our conviction of God's right to rule. If we would increase our abhorrence of sin, strengthen our sense of obligation to obedience, deepen our conviction of God's right to rule, there are a number of duties I would urge.

1st. Obedience. As every act of disobedience weakens the sense of obligation to obey, so every act of obedience strengthens it. As you strive to obey God, you will feel the obligation more and more.

2nd. Reflection. Think of God's claims as Creator, as Preserver, as Redeemer. Think how beneficent and wise all His laws are proved by experience to be. Think of your life—in how many points it has been a violation of God's law—of how much better it would be for you if you had obeyed.

3rd. Read the Scriptures. Study God's character and His government as it is unfolded there. Neglect of these points accounts for the carelessness of many. Pray for enlightenment—for the Holy Spirit. The effect of a constant effort after obedience, of frequent and earnest thoughtfulness, of the study of God's word, will be to

produce an abiding sense of obligation, which is usually called conscientiousness; but the Holy Spirit can, in a moment, give a man conviction on these matters—a view of his obligation, of God's claims, of sin's exceeding sinfulness—which nothing else can. Genuine confession for sin springs from a conviction in the conscience. That conviction will be produced on every mind willing to be enlightened by the Light which lightens every man that cometh into the world. Such confession implies faith in Jesus.

Then the promise. The faithfulness of God is pointed out as assuring the pardon of those who thus confess. In condescension to our weakness, God has seen fit to bind himself (I would speak reverently) by His word. Here, by his servant, he reminds us of that, to strengthen our faith. In Proverbs xxviii. 13 we read, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy." Paul says that "God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath:" (see Heb. vi. 17-20.) So here, that all who penitently confess their sins may have comfort, he reminds them of His promise. He is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of a man, that he should repent,

i.e., change His purpose. If you have sincerely and penitently confessed your sins, the word of the Lord has gone forth—that word which is sure as the pillars of heaven—that word which shall not pass away, though heaven and earth pass away. Can you doubt that word?

Again, the justice of God is spoken of as requiring your pardon when you confess. As far as we as individuals are concerned, justice would call for our punishment. We have never done anything, we never can do anything, to atone for our sins; but since our Surety has paid the debt—since the atonement for us has been accepted, God can, in accordance with strict justice, forgive. We are in the habit of thinking of justice as engaged alone in the work of punishment. Justice bolts the prison door when the criminal is condemned to suffer the penalty of the law. Justice lifts the lash and smites. Justice draws the bolt and launches the culprit into eternity. But we should not forget that it is the work of justice to unbar the door and unloose the chain when the debt has been paid. Justice releases the criminal when the surety has suffered in his stead. So here the wrath of God against sin has been shown. The debt has been paid. Now, let us remember, to the glory of God as well as for our

own encouragement, that the forgiveness of the humble, sincere penitent is an act of justice as well as of mercy. God does not need to lower the demands of the law to pardon you, for the demands have been satisfied. The honour of the divine government is not tarnished.

A man in despair thought the justice of God shut up every door of hope. A minister visited him and pointed out this verse. The very justice that apparently awakened his fear should encourage his hope. The justice of God was pledged to pardon.

VI.

Profit of Godliness.

“Godliness is profitable unto all things.”—1 *Tim.* iv. 8.

“**D**OES it pay?” is a question often asked in this practical age. It is the simple test which men of common sense apply to ascertain the value of everything. That which cannot make good its claim by an affirmative answer will soon be discarded, no matter how strongly recommended it may be. We have no disposition to dispute the fairness of the test. He who in the market pays more for an article than it is worth, or who buys an article which is of no worth to him, is a foolish man. He who invests his money, his time, his intellect in a business, without first ascertaining that it pays, is a foolish man. The religion of Christ asks no escape from any reasonable test. If it makes claims on our acceptance and obedience, it does so on reasonable grounds. “Come and let us reason together,” is the language of religion to men in all ages. We have no cause

to fear a candid investigation of the claims of religion. During eighteen hundred years it has undergone the most searching scrutiny. It is undergoing the closest scrutiny to-day. We confidently claim that the more searching the scrutiny, the more clearly will the claims of Christianity appear. We recommend religion to you to-night on the ground of its profitability. The Apostle said eighteen hundred years ago, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Can we still make good the claim of religion on this ground, or has it lost its adaptation to the wants of men? Has the world outgrown it? We confidently claim that, when looked at in this as well as in other respects, the claims of religion will but appear stronger. The experience of the past makes faith in the declaration of the Apostle an easy matter.

First let us be agreed on what we mean by godliness. If a man in buying an article has a sham, a counterfeit, palmed off on him as the real article, his judgment of the article ought not to be formed from the counterfeit. Many a man has been led astray in judging religion by mistaking for it that which was a sham. By godliness I do not understand the mere holding of a number of beliefs on religious sub-

jects, called orthodox. I do not mean merely belonging to some branch of the Christian Church. By godliness I understand being in our degree like God. Man, at creation, we read, was made in the image of God—*i.e.*, in his moral image—loving those things God loves, and hating those things God hates. I do not understand merely the punctilious performance of a certain round of duties, though that may be included; nor the regular attendance on Church ordinances, though that may be included. Religion, one has defined as the conformity of the soul with God, and the conformity of the life to His law. It implies the restoration of man to the likeness of God, in which he was created. Godliness is literally God-likeness. A man is a godly man only in so far as he is a God-like man. Men are in the habit of judging of religion by its professors. While I acknowledge that to some extent they are right in doing so, yet I would remind you that among professors you have but a very poor exemplification of what it really is. It is very imperfect in the best; in some it is but a caricature. Very few have submitted themselves fully to the influence of the gospel. You can form but a poor idea what a building will be while the scaffolding is up, and many parts are incomplete; so you

get an imperfect idea of the Christian here, because his character is incomplete. Although God is the master-builder in Christian character, yet men themselves are the workmen, and the perfectness of a work depends not only on the perfectness of the plan, but on the perfectness of the execution. We have a perfect plan, and human character, if built exactly according to that plan, would be a perfect exemplification of godliness, and would, by its attractiveness, do much in drawing men to Christ; but alas! the perfect plan is marred in the hands of unskilful workmen—yea, many a time, of disobedient workmen. You may criticise us Christians severely—and we deserve it; but don't blame the plan—don't blame the Master-builder. You may blame us servants, but don't, we beseech you, blame the Master. There is many a man professedly a Christian who has gone utterly astray. In judging the skill of a physician, it would not be fair for you to take one who professed to go to him for a cure, yet who, after having gone, evidently was neither taking the medicine nor following the directions. So in judging religion, don't take one who merely professes to be following Christ, yet really is not. To return to the figure of a building. It would be unfair in you to condemn the plan of an architect, because the work of the builder was imperfect

unless you felt sure that the building was according to the plan. First ascertain that the building was in strict accordance with the plan, and then it would be just to condemn the plan if the building was defective. So before rejecting or even before judging Christianity, be sure that the exhibition of it is according to the plan, and the plan you have here in God's word. If you would know what godliness is, don't judge alone from the lives of men. Take God's word; study its requirements; ask yourself, "If I followed those, would I not be a gainer? If the world followed those, would there not be great gain?" We have one perfect exemplification of godliness, and only one. God has given us that one for our guidance. Study the character of Christ in His humanity, in those qualities which it is possible for us to imitate, and ask yourself again, "If I possessed those would I not be a gainer?" Yet, although I have thought it necessary to remind you that in the Church you have but an imperfect exemplification of godliness, I still believe that even in the imperfect exemplification we can see abundant proof that godliness is profitable unto all things. Although our profiting has not appeared to all men as clearly as it should, yet most solemnly we avow that we have found godliness profitable. It has lifted us to a

higher and purer moral atmosphere. Imperfect and faulty as we with shame acknowledge we are, we would be more imperfect and more faulty still but for the religion of Christ. Not only have we found benefit in the past, but we find in religion that which has a constantly improving influence. It is not merely something which is useful for a time and then loses its influence, but it is constantly useful. The motives it uses are as powerful in old age as in youth. Thus we recognise in religion that which will go on through this life at least. We recognise in the perfect adaptation of the religion of Christ, an additional proof of its divine origin. Believing it of divine origin, we believe that God will help our weakness; and imperfect though the work in us now may be, we confidently anticipate the time when the top stone shall be brought on with shouting. Though, through our own waywardness, the work is imperfect, yet even in this imperfect experience we get foretastes of a joy unspeakable—of a peace that passeth all understanding—our tranquillity increases, our happiness increases, as we more ardently aspire after godliness. Thus the profit we receive here gives us hope of greater profit when the work is complete.

I. The Apostle asserts that it "is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that

now is." If we appeal to individual experience or to history, we think we can get abundant proof of this first proposition. Godliness is *conducive to health*. In this world our physical and our spiritual nature are so bound together that they constantly act upon each other. Every man who has observed the matter at all, must know that bodily health has an effect—has an influence on his spiritual nature. A man may have a strong provocation to sourness—ill temper—in his bodily state. Now, the converse is just as true. Cheerfulness of spirits, peace of conscience, any physician will tell you, is conducive to bodily health. Godliness forbids, is inconsistent with, those vices which are among the most influential causes in sapping physical health. Go to almost any burial-ground in our country, and you will be pointed to many a grave that might still have been without an occupant had men been possessed of godliness. I could take you to-day—I have visited in the past week one at least who is probably hurrying to the grave, who would have been well had he been possessed of that godliness which is spoken of in my text.

Again, godliness promotes health, by making it a duty to guard it. In no land is suicide so much condemned as in Christian lands. The heathen seem in some doubt about the morality of the

act. Some would even seem to have applauded it. Godliness promotes *temporal prosperity*. It makes industry and frugality duties. To be diligent in business is a duty as well as to be fervent in spirit. While it forbids all those means of acquiring property which amount to robbing others, it encourages and commends that industry by which a man adds to his own wealth and the wealth of the community at the same time. It forbids and condemns that insatiable greed for gain which marks so many in our own day—a greed which leads men to disregard the interests of others, to raise themselves up by pulling others down—a greed which, because of its very eagerness, prevents a man from enjoying what he has acquired—a greed which in a few instances leads to immense fortunes, but in many leads to immense failures. It encourages and commends that steady industry and careful husbanding by which a man can steadily raise himself, at the same time that he does not at least interfere with the raising of others. It teaches him to regard himself but as the steward of that which he acquires. It teaches him to use it not selfishly, but for the good of others as well as himself. It will be found on investigation that the wealth-producing classes—the classes whose industry increases the national wealth are the God-fearing classes.

As a proof that godliness promotes prosperity, I refer to the fact that the lands where godliness has most influence are the wealthiest lands. Travel through our country, and you will find that those communities where the people respect God's day most, and read His word most, have an air of thrift others have not. I have heard of an infidel who was starting a village in the West, and so impressed was he with the beneficial influence of Christianity that he himself initiated a Sunday-school. Again, godliness makes a man a better citizen. Its command is not only "Fear God," but also "Honour the king." It teaches us to see in human government a representation of the divine government. It makes subjection and obedience to the powers that be a part of our subjection to God. It commands, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinances of God." Godliness makes a man a better member of society; gives him broader views, a kindlier sympathy; makes him more disposed to help his fellows—to bear their burdens. How could it be otherwise while the godly man strives to imitate that perfect exemplification of godliness given us? The man who professes to be a godly man, and

yet is not sympathetic and charitable and kind, has missed one of the most prominent qualities in his pattern. Study that exhibition of God which He has given us in His parables. Study the parables of the good Samaritan and of the Prodigal. Study that exhibition of God-like qualities seen in His life and acts. All His miracles, with perhaps one exception, were performed to help the suffering or the needy. Study the life of Christ from the first to the last, from the manger of Bethlehem to the cross of Calvary, and you will find it all expressed by one of his sayings, "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." My friends, while I recommend to you godliness as profitable I would not have you overlook the chief feature of godliness. Here godliness comes into the most direct opposition to the spirit of the world. The spirit of the world is a selfish spirit; of the gospel of godliness, a self-sacrificing spirit. Just in proportion to the degree to which you have this spirit are you a better member of society. Notwithstanding the fact that men have not profited as they should from this feature of godliness, yet the profit is manifest on the large scale at least. Benevolent institutions are an outgrowth of Christianity. Godliness fits a man for all the relationships he is called upon to fill in life. You cannot

find one in which a man is not prepared better to act his part by godliness. It makes better servants; for one of its commands is, "Servants, obey your masters, not with eye service as men pleasers, but with goodwill." Do you tell me that men professing godliness are not better servants? I say then they are not, in that at least, possessed of godliness. It makes better masters; for it commands, "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven." If they are not, then, in that respect at least, they are not godly. It makes obedient children. "Children, obey your parents." It makes better parents. "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." There is no relationship of life that is not benefited by godliness.

But you may object to much that I have said. You may tell me that many whose godliness you have most confidence in are not prosperous, but have barely enough to supply life's necessities. I admit it, yet maintain what I have said. Even in the case of the man who is not prosperous in worldly affairs, godliness does much to enable him to bear the ills of life. If condemned in some instances to poverty, it enables him to bear it more cheerfully than others. It teaches him that "a man's life con-

sisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesseth." A dinner of herbs may be better than a stalled ox, if there be contentment with it. I can take you to houses of poverty, where there is more real enjoyment from the little the Lord gives them, than is found in many of the palaces of princes. Oh! many of the most decidedly godly are doomed to a life of affliction. Yes; but godliness has an antidote. It hangs a bow of promise on the darkest cloud, for it teaches its possessor that "these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." A poor woman, expressing her thanks over a crust of bread, was asked why she was so thankful, when she replied: "All this, and Jesus!" This brings us to a profit of godliness which none can judge of but its possessor—a profit beside which all those I have mentioned are small indeed. Godliness brings with it a consciousness of the promise of divine favour—of forgiveness of sin. To know the full profit of godliness in this world, you must know the feeling of a soul consciously in harmony with God—of a soul consciously enjoying manifestations of the divine favour. There is no joy so deep, no pleasure so satisfying, no peace so calm, as that of a soul renewed after the divine likeness—that is, of a soul possessing God-

likeness. You must know the feeling of a soul consciously at variance, not in harmony with God. There is no more dreadful feeling than that of a soul fully awake to the awfulness of being unlike God and at variance with God. To feel that one does not love what He loves—that one has run counter to the will of the great God—no feeling of disquiet, of alarm, can equal it. You must feel that removed, and then will you know the feeling of the soul not only at peace, but adopted—a child of God.

There are many God-fearing persons who know nothing of the profits of godliness, but such as naturally flow from a life of integrity—an honest, constant effort to do all their duty. But even in this world there are richer treasures of profit God gives to His people—to those who not only in their outward life, but also in their hearts, are Godlike. If you would have that richer experience, know that greater profit, you must seek for that operation of the Spirit by which the divine likeness is restamped on the soul. Godliness is not merely the harmony of the life with God's law, but the harmony of the soul with God. The first may apparently take place without the second. The second never takes place without the first. The first may be the result of the ordinary grace God bestows on all men; the second is only the result of the

special operation of His Spirit. I would not undervalue a godly outer life. I would that there was more display of godliness in the outer life of God's people. To this life of conformity to God's law there is profit; but to the entire conformity of both heart and life to God's will, I understand the second part of the promise alone to refer. In other words, a man must be born again to have the life to come. You will be infinite gainers if you have that God-likeness which results from a renewal in the divine image; you will be infinite losers if you have it not.

II. Hath the promise of the life to come. The promises of God to the godly, cover the whole of their existence. In this world there is the promise, "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." In the next, there is fulness of joy in His presence for evermore.

Godliness implies harmony with God—similarity of feeling with God. Now, reason joins revelation in teaching that if I am in harmony with God I shall prosper. Reason joins revelation in teaching that if a man is in opposition to God he must fail—be baffled. If a man should choose to act in defiance of natural law, he sooner or later suffers for it. If a man chooses to live in violation of the laws of health, his constitution will in time give way. So if

a man chooses to act in violation of spiritual law, he must just as certainly suffer for it. Some weeks ago, in preaching to you, I endeavoured to show that if a man lived in violation of the moral laws it led toward ruin even in this world. To-night I have endeavoured to show that if man obeys moral law it leads to profit even in this world. In this world we have light enough to show that righteousness pays and is profitable, and to show that sin is unprofitable, and ruins. By the effects of sin on the one hand and of righteousness on the other, in this world, we may form an opinion of the consequences of sin and of righteousness in the world to come. Believing in our God, we would naturally be led to believe that the great principles of His moral government are the same in this and in all other worlds. All the accumulating evidence of scientific investigation proves that natural law is the same throughout the universe. The laws of gravitation operating on this earth on which we dwell are found to be the same as the laws of gravitation regulating the course of the moon or the planets. So, my friends, I say we have reason to suppose the great principles of moral government are the same everywhere apart from revelation. As other texts of Scripture prove that the effects of sin in this world, leading to

ruin, are followed by effects similar in kind, but infinitely worse; so my text this evening, joined with others, proves that the profit of godliness in this world is followed by profit in the next, but infinitely greater.

That there is a life to come is the plain teaching of God's word—a teaching that is corroborated by the belief of all lands. It is also the teaching of God's word, that the state of the soul in that life to come is unchanging; and further, we believe that the state of the soul in that unchanging, endless life to come is the same as its state at death—proving, on the one hand, that a state of sin, of alienation from God, is a state of constant loss; a soul entering the endless life to come in alienation from God is eternally a loser; so, on the other hand, a soul entering that eternal state in harmony with God is an eternal gainer. As the consequences of sin in this world are severe enough to be a warning to all who will be warned, but not sufficient to crush; so the profit of godliness is sufficient to allure. The pain and loss consequent upon sin, and the profit consequent upon godliness, are sufficient to corroborate and give additional force to the teachings of His word; but we must not for a moment suppose that the loss on the one hand, or the gain on the other, are at all to be compared with the loss

and gain in the life to come. If the consequences of sin, on the one hand, were more marked than they are—if every act of sin were followed by immediate retribution, loss in every respect—if every act of godliness were hallowed by immediate reward—if no apparent prosperity were given to the wicked, and no apparent adversity were given to the godly, this life would cease to be a state of trial. Self-interest would force a man to choose the right and abandon the wrong. There would be no trial to give up that which brought only, and evidently, disaster. But in a world like ours, where adversity sometimes apparently overtakes the righteous, and success sometimes apparently attends the wicked—where there is yet sufficient light to show God's disapproval of the wicked, and approval of the righteous, it is evidently adapted as a scene of trial. But when we have passed through the life of trial, we will enter on one that will be a life of reward, and only reward, on the one hand, and one of punishment, and only punishment, on the other.

Friends, godliness is profitable. Beside that I place the other truth, not mentioned in my text, but with it equally taught in God's word—sin is unprofitable. If that were only so of this life, I might feel I had little influence

with some of you. A man might say, "I prefer what you call the loss of sin, mingled with a kind of pleasure, as I know by experience. You may prefer the profit of godliness, if you will, mingled, as you admit, with some trial." I might feel I had no way of meeting you; but when I can come, and, on the authority of God's word, tell you that the loss of sin here which you feel in some pangs of conscience, or in some other way, is to be unmingled and unending loss in the world to come, and that the gain of godliness is to be unmingled and unending gain in the life to come, I feel that I have an argument that ought to influence every reasonable man.

We must all go hence to be here no more. About the other world we may not know much; but reason ought to tell us that if we go hence in harmony, at peace with, and having God-like characters, we have nothing to fear. Again, reason ought just as emphatically to tell us that if we go hence with wills and natures opposed to God we have everything to fear.

I present you with profit on the one hand and loss on the other. I tell you of threatenings and frowns of God and eternal punishment. I tell you of promises covering all the way from your espousals to Christ, from your choosing of godliness as your portion, to your

entrance to the presence of God. I promise that even the afflictions of your life shall add to the weight of your glory. I tell you of reward infinite and eternal, and I ask how long halt ye?

Does a life of sin pay? No. Experience says no. God's word says no. It causes infinite and eternal loss. Does a life of godliness pay? Yes. Experience says yes. The word of God says yes. It yields infinite and eternal profit.

VII.

Spiritual Development.

“Grow in grace.”—2 *Peter* iii. 18.

GROWTH, gradual approach to perfection or maturity, seems to mark most if not all the works of God. The world on which we live gradually assumed the form and condition in which it now is. It is the result of growth. “In the beginning,” we read, “the earth was without form, and void.” The power of God gradually evolved from the shapeless mass our beautiful earth, fixing a bound for the seas which they should not pass, causing the land to bring forth grass and herb, and the seas to swarm with fishes. The researches of modern scientific men make it probable that the period during which the earth was gradually approaching its present condition was very lengthened, each day of the six representing vast periods of time. Revelation itself—the Word of God—was not at first given in its completeness. First the books of Moses. Gradually the prophets and

inspired historians and holy men added each his portion, until the volume is complete—a sufficient revelation of God's character and will—a sufficient indication of man's duty and destiny. The Church, even as it exists at present, is the result of growth, and still it is growing, and will continue to grow until the whole earth is embraced in the widening circle of its influence. So is it in the natural kingdom. We have first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear; or, first the little plantule with its short root, its two green leaves just protruding above the ground, then the little shrub, then the sapling, then the mighty tree. So in the animal kingdom. There is among human kind, first the infant, then the child, then the youth, then the matured man. And it seems the same is true in the spiritual kingdom. Our Lord in various parables teaches the gradual development of the spiritual seed. We hear St. Paul speaking of some as babes in Christ. St. John writes to little children, to young men, and to fathers. Why this growth should thus characterize the works of God in the three kingdoms—the natural, the animal, and the spiritual—we cannot tell. God could doubtless have caused our world to appear at first in its present form and revelation in its completeness; but He has seen fit in His wisdom to adopt this method. In

the spiritual world, our growth, it appears, depends on ourselves, otherwise there would be no need for the exhortation of our text. In the spiritual as in the animal kingdom, the three great essentials of growth are life, food, and exercise.

I. *In order to growth there must be life.* This is as true in the spiritual kingdom as in the animal or vegetable. We must be certain there is life before we can expect growth. You have, perhaps, gone in the spring-time to the forests for a shrub or sapling. You have brought it home and planted it in your garden. You have covered its roots with the richest earth, and have thought in a few years that will become a beautiful shade tree—an ornament to my grounds, and a cool retreat from the summer sun. But the days and weeks pass; the spring sun shines in its brightness, the spring rains descend in abundance; yet the tree does not bud nor put forth tender shoots. You have gone and examined it, and you have found it dead. Then you need not that one should tell you the cause of its not growing. It is dead. So is it in the spiritual kingdom. Many an one has been brought into the Church—or if you will allow the figure, has been transplanted into the garden of the Lord. The Sun of Righteousness has shone on all around. The

dews of divine grace have descended, but the Church member does not grow. After weeks, and months, and years have passed, there are the same imperfections of temper, the same shortcomings in duty, that marked him before. The buds of grace do not appear—love and joy and peace, long-suffering, patience, etc. The minister wonders how it is. He, however, soon surmises the truth. The man is spiritually dead. He is borne with for a time, is warned, and at length his name is struck off the Church records. The plant that had been transplanted into the garden of the Lord is dead, twice dead, and now plucked up by the roots. I repeat, in order to growth there must be life. A man may attend all the means of grace—may visit regularly the table of the Lord—but he will not grow in grace unless there is the vital principle within. You might as well expect a dead plant to grow by heaping rich earth around its roots and supplying it with moisture, as to expect a dead soul to grow by means of grace. Then the first question for us to settle is, Have we spiritual life? We easily detect vegetable or animal death. We detect it by the absence of those manifestations that always accompany life. If we had passed the barren fig tree which Christ cursed; if we had seen its withered leaves, its dead branches, we would

have had no hesitancy in pronouncing the cause. It is dead! Why? Because we know that green leaves are a manifestation of life in the vegetable kingdom during the summer season. If we had gone with Martha and Mary to the tomb of Lazarus, and seen the stiffened corpse; no smile of recognition passing over the pale face; no arm extended to embrace the weeping sister, we would have had no hesitation in assigning a cause. He is dead! Why? Because we know that motion of the limbs, a change of expression in the countenance, are manifestations of human life wherever it exists. How shall we know a dead soul? By the same means—by the absence of those manifestations that always accompany spiritual life. If we see one who gives little heed to the divine warnings by trying to escape the danger pointed out—little heed to the divine invitations by trying to embrace the offered mercy, we cannot be much astray if we come to the conclusion that he is dead. As one has said, “When a man’s heart is cold and unconcerned about religion; when his hands are never employed in doing God’s work; when his feet are not familiar with God’s ways; when his tongue is seldom or never employed in prayer and praise; when his ears are deaf to the voice of Christ in the Gospel; when his eyes are blind to the beauties of the king-

dom of heaven; when his mind is full of the world, and has no room for spiritual things, the right word to use about him is, Dead." Have you spiritual life? otherwise you cannot grow. "Well," says one, "I know I was converted. I can never forget—never doubt that." I will not dispute your conversion, nor will I lower its importance. But have you retained the spiritual life imparted at conversion? Spiritual life comes from Christ. "I am come," said He, "that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." Christ is the great fount of spiritual life, and it is only as we are united with Him and draw from Him that we live spiritually. Living faith alone unites us to Christ, who is the life. "I live," says Paul, "yet not I but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." Life, whether in the vegetable, the animal, or the spiritual kingdom, is a mystery. The wisest philosopher in the world cannot fully explain to you what it is that enables the plant to change the particles of the earth and air and water into the fibre of the stem, the green of the leaf, or the gorgeous colour of the flower. Cut the plant down—in other words, take away its life—and although the earth and air, sunshine and moisture, may all be as abundant as ever, yet they are no longer converted into

green leaves, or fibrous stalk, or beautiful flowers. The plant no longer grows. Why? Because there is no longer life. So in the animal kingdom. That subtle, mysterious thing which no one is able to understand or explain, is absolutely essential to growth. So is it of spiritual life. Again, we notice that where there is an absence of life, the very causes that promoted growth before now promote decay. The moisture, the sunshine, that are so essential to vegetable growth during the continuance of life, are the causes of more rapid decomposition when death has supervened. So the means of grace, the preaching of the Word, may be the cause of spiritual decay when spiritual life has departed. Again I ask, Have you spiritual life? While we cannot create it ourselves, yet the fault is our own if we have it not, for "Christ has come that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly." Ah! it is Christ's intention that we shall have this life abundantly. Not a feeble, flickering, dying sort of life, but buoyant, joyful, strong; not the life of an invalid, but of a strong vigorous man. If you have this abundant life, you will grow. Vegetable and animal growth are promoted by the sunlight. Plants and men that live shut out from the sunlight are pale and sickly. So, spiritually, we need the

light of the Sun of Righteousness. One who seldom or never feels the warming, gladdening presence of the Sun of Righteousness will not grow very rapidly. There is this difference, however, between animal or vegetable life and spiritual. They cannot continue. The plant must die; the leaves will droop and fall, the stem and branches will decay. So of animal life. These bodies of ours must die, and return to earth. As there is a limit to life, so is there to growth. But there is no limit either to spiritual life or spiritual growth. If the life has commenced, it need never die—it may parallel the existence of God. "He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." So our growth may continue forever, we believe. Those graces that are peculiar to us as probationers may continue to grow while we are in this world. The wings of faith may become stronger and stronger till we can dwell constantly in the sunshine above the clouds. Our hope may wax brighter and brighter, and bloom more and more with eternal life. Our love may ever grow, we believe, as eternal ages pass. Life is absolutely essential to growth, and faith is absolutely essential to life. So if we would grow, we must cultivate faith.

II. *Food, nourishment, is the second essential of growth* we notice. The shrub may have life,

but unless it is furnished with food from the soil and the moisture it will not grow—nay, it will soon die. So in the animal kingdom there may be life, and healthy life too, but there cannot be any increase of bone and muscle and blood, unless there is a supply of food. So is it spiritually. There may be life, but the Christian cannot grow unless that life is nourished by food. It is a blessed thing that while food is so necessary, it is provided in such abundance. Think of the supply of food for our bodily wants. Every morning some twelve hundred million mouths to be fed, together with the fowls of the air, the beasts of the field, etc. But while the supply is great for bodily wants, it is greater for spiritual. None need perish for want of the bread of life. Yet while it has been provided in abundance, we are not to suppose that we have nothing to do in securing that supply. God has made abundant provision for our physical wants in nature. He has given man seed, which, when sown in properly prepared soil, will, with God's blessing, in connection with the rain and sunshine, bring forth an abundant harvest. But suppose that mankind, for a single year, should refuse to cultivate the soil and to sow the seed—the result would be almost universal starvation, probably. "But," says one, "you do not pretend to say that our supply

of spiritual food, like our supply of bodily food, depends on labour." Well, the cases are not so different, perhaps, as most are ready to suppose. Our Lord commands us to "labour for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life." God has made an abundant supply in nature for our bodily wants, but in order that we obtain that supply we must comply with certain conditions. God has made an abundant supply in grace for our spiritual wants, but in order to obtain that supply also we must comply with the conditions, and one of those conditions it seems is labour. What we mean by food is, whatever nourishes and strengthens the soul. One of the greatest sources of the Christian's strength is the Word of God. It is an exhaustless storehouse of food for the Christian. It is like the widow's cruise—it does not grow less with our frequent applications to it. After years of perusal, the Christian finds its promises as precious as ever. Or it is like the five barley loaves and two small fishes among the five thousand. Just as the disciples were sent forth among the multitudes, so ministers of the gospel in thousands, every Sabbath morning, go forth each with his portion to break to the people. And there is a supply for every class of hearer—from the hardened sinner to the confirmed Christian. It would be well if Christians went more to this storehouse of food—this

fountain of the water of life. What one gets from good books and from sermons may be all very well ; but the spiritual food is, so to speak, second-hand. Go to the storehouse for yourself. I fear that in this age of good books the Bible is neglected. It is like all God's works—it can have no equal. It should have no substitute. "Give me *the Book!*" said Sir W. Scott, when dying. "What Book?" said his friend. "There is but one Book," said the dying man. "Let me be a man of one Book," said John Wesley. But in order that we may obtain spiritual food from the Word of God, we must study it—not merely glance over its sacred pages. "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me." Every Christian should every day read at least a small portion of the Word. Then, good books doubtless furnish us with spiritual food; and these, through the labours of pious men, have been supplied in such abundance, and are so within the reach of all, that every Christian may have a supply of them. And in seeking food in books, we must remember it is not the quantity so much as the quality that is to be regarded. I feel persuaded that in this age we read too much, and do not keep a practical end in view as we should. And while the age in

which we live has furnished many useful books, yet I question whether the books that contain most spiritual food are not those of an early day. Such works as those of Wesley are admirable for this purpose. It is a pity our people do not read the works of the founder of Methodism more. Then there are such works as Baxter's "Saint's Rest," the "Imitation of Christ," etc.—works that no one need read who is seeking merely for amusement; but if one is seeking stimulation, food, help, let him read them. If we should every morning store our minds with good thoughts, it would be a source of strength and growth to us. Again, religious conversation, whether in the class-meeting or the social circle, may furnish spiritual food. My friends, our souls have wants that must be supplied as well as our bodies. Christ has taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," and we should use it every day. Can we wonder that we do not grow, when we think how careless even the best of us are in partaking spiritual nutriment? Let this thought be fixed—there can be no growth without food.

III. The third essential I notice is exercise. We all know the influence of exercise on the human system. See the brawny muscle of the blacksmith's arm. Exercise has given it a development it does not receive with most men.

That exercise is necessary to the development of our powers of mind and body is easily demonstrated. What mother would expect her child to grow, if she kept it wrapped for years so that the limbs could not be used? When she removes the bandages, and tells the child to walk forth, the little weakling would not be able to stand alone. There would be no development of muscle on the limbs to brace the body against the slightest breeze; so mentally, if the spontaneous activity that usually characterizes the mind of a child could be repressed, mental imbecility would be the result. Activity, exercise, the use of our powers is essential to their development and growth. This is as true spiritually as mentally or physically. The exercise of the spiritual life God gives us is absolutely necessary to its growth. For this cause many are weak and sickly amongst us. For this cause ministers have too often to adopt the tone of the Apostle when he said: "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk and not with meat, for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able." Many linger in a state of spiritual infancy all their lives; many lapse again into a state of spiritual death. One of the first promptings of the spiritual life,

when it is given a man, is to do something. But too frequently that prompting is repressed until it ceases. If we love God and our fellows, that love naturally seeks some manifestation, and unless it is manifest it will soon cease. Who are those who become pillars in the temple of God—cedars in Lebanon? They are the men who have used the grace given. Look at that man who has been moving as a spiritual giant for the last year or two among the churches of Great Britain and Ireland, who has led thousands to the feet of Christ, who is stirring the masses of the world's greatest city as no one has since the days of Whitefield and the Wesleys. What has given him such spiritual power? What enables him to stand like Saul of old, head and shoulders above his fellows? It is not natural talents, although I am not at all certain but he has more than the ordinary amount of natural ability. Yet there are doubtless thousands of equal if not greater abilities in the churches of America to-day, who will live and die and their influence scarcely be felt. I think we will find the secret of his power if we go back to the early days of his Christian life, and see him gathering a class for the Sabbath-school—speaking to those whom he met about their soul, until in Chicago they called him “crazy Moody.” God had given

him spiritual life, and he used it, notwithstanding the sneers of the ungodly, and I doubt not the coldness of formal Christians. As a consequence, he rapidly developed to spiritual manhood, and to-day, as a mighty man of God, he has scarcely a peer on earth. "Them that honour Me will I honour." "To him that hath shall be given." Imagine Moody as a young Christian repressing his zeal, consulting flesh and blood—he would doubtless to-day, in that case, have been a spiritual dwarf or a backslider. Spiritual inactivity is the great cause of spiritual weakness and feebleness. Every Christian should have some work to do for God. Nor need any lie idle for want of a field. There are moral deserts all around us that might be made to blossom as the rose. There are fields that are white unto the harvest. If you want a field of labour, you can find it anywhere. If we are willing to do anything the Lord would have us do, there is plenty of room for us in the vineyard. How many opportunities of spiritual exercise we have in our ordinary occupations! Every temptation to anger affords an opportunity of cultivating the grace of forbearance; every temptation to revenge, an opportunity for cultivating love. Little opportunities of usefulness present themselves every day almost; and in improving them we will not only

be a blessing to others, but will greatly promote our own spiritual growth.

In conclusion, are you growing in grace? It is a Methodistic saying, grown almost trite by repetition, "there is no standing still in religion." It is an established truth, however. In rowing against the current, if a man ceases to row he will be carried backward. If a man has a fortune and does not use it, does not increase it, he is very apt to be eating up the principal. The plant of grace is not the natural production of the heart. It is an exotic—comes from a foreign soil. This world is an unfriendly clime. The sirocco that comes from the desert of unbelief around us may parch it. The chilling blasts that come from the Arctic seas of cold formality will retard its growth—the canker worm of worldly care and anxiety is ready to rob it of its strength—and even as it approaches maturity the mildew is ready to blast it in the ear. How often has the farmer thought, while waiting through the cold chilly days of a backward spring, "there will be no harvest this year. My labour will be lost." Yet God always gives a harvest. So in the spiritual world; there will be growth if we use the means till we all come to the stature of men in Christ—till we shall at length be gathered as a ripe shock of corn in season to the Master's garner on high.

VIII.

Christ Precious.

“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.”—
1 Peter ii. 7.

ONE proof of the divine origin of Christianity is the universality of its adaptation. Superstitions are found suited to a particular race, but unsuited to others; flourish in one stage of civilization, but are unable to endure a more advanced stage. But Christianity, coming down through eighteen centuries, has proved itself suited to all the varied stages of human progress, from the savage to the most enlightened. It has just as firm a grasp—yes, a firmer grasp of the human mind in the most enlightened nations, than it has on the comparatively ignorant. Again, Christianity bears the same blessed fruit in one age as another; in one race as in another. St. Peter, writing to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, gives them all one test by which

they might judge of the sincerity of their faith—presents them all with one mark by which they might judge the genuineness of their religion: "To you that believe He is precious." The Christian to-day may take this mark, or any other mentioned by the Apostles, and he will find that which corresponds in his own experience. The Christian thus has a proof that others have not of the divine origin of Christianity. The converted Hottentot, or the converted European of to-day, finds religion giving rise to the same joy and peace to-day in his heart as it gave rise to in the heart of Paul eighteen centuries ago. Now, as of old, "To you that believe He is precious."

What is it to believe? Faith, to many persons, seems one of the greatest mysteries—really, it is one of the simplest and most spontaneous acts of the mind—so simple that to attempt to explain it seems only frequently to darken counsel by words. It seems to me a striking illustration of the goodness of God, that He has suspended the blessings of the gospel on a condition which can be complied with as easily by the young as by the old—by the poor as by the rich. The life of a child is largely a life of faith, with reference to the affairs of this world. How little that the child knows is the fruit of experience! As the

years pass, the circle of experimental knowledge widens; yet all through life how much of what we claim to know with assurance, can we know in such a way that when occasion requires it we can act on that knowledge with the utmost confidence! How many of us know from actual experience of the existence of such cities as London or Paris? yet if business or some other necessity required us to-morrow to set out for either of those cities, we would do so with the utmost confidence that there were such places. Our knowledge of the existence of such places is founded on faith in the testimony of others. To come nearer home—how many objects in nature, how many of the products of man's skill and toil exist all around us, which we have never seen, yet of the existence of which we have not the slightest doubt! How much of the business and affairs of life is managed by faith in the testimony of others! The merchant regulates his prices, in buying and selling, by his faith in prices as quoted in the morning paper. From the highest to the humblest—from the richest to the poorest—from the youngest to the oldest, there is not one whose faith is not called into daily exercise. Put a stop to the exercise of faith—let men in the ordinary affairs of life be influenced only by what they know from experience, and

you would put a stop to the wheels of progress, that would be like stopping a train under a full head of steam. Faith is one of the mightiest forces by which the world is kept moving. Now, this principle which finds so large an exercise in ordinary life is that which God requires especially to be exercised in the matter of salvation. That same faith which is necessary to life in the affairs of this world is still more necessary for spiritual life. God's word presents us with certain truths. In order that we may be saved we must have firm belief in these truths, and allow them to have their legitimate influence, just as men do in the ordinary affairs of life. Saving faith implies something more than intellectual assent. Intellectual assent must be allowed to have its legitimate effect before it becomes saving faith. In the ordinary life mere assent to any truth will be of no benefit to a man. Faith only becomes a mighty principle as it is allowed to have its legitimate influence on us. For instance—a moneyed man is told that by investing his means in a certain way he will realize great profits. He may have perfect confidence or strong faith in what he is told; but unless he allows his faith in the advice to lead him to invest as directed, his faith of itself will not secure him a share in the profits. It will be all the same

to him as though he had not believed. A man sick with fever may believe what the doctor says when he tells him that in order to be well he must leave the low country where he is living—where the marshes exhale malaria—and move up on to the mountain slopes, where there is a pure, bracing atmosphere. But his belief will not effect a cure; while he remains where he is, it will be the same to him as though he had not believed. So, spiritually, our faith is only saving as it is allowed to have its legitimate influence on us. A man may have a belief as orthodox as the Apostle Paul's, and, as far as intellectual assent is concerned, may believe as firmly as Paul, and yet may go to hell. Of what consequence is it to a man to believe in one God, the Creator of all things, while he refuses that subjection and obedience which he, as Creator, has a right to demand? Of what benefit to believe in the Holy Spirit as the Sanctifier, unless he goes to Him for sanctification? Of what consequence to believe in Jesus as a Saviour, unless he goes to Him for salvation? "Thou believest there is one God, even Christ;" and "To you that believe He is precious."

But there are many who believe in that way, yet do not feel Christ precious. Our belief, I say, must be allowed to have its legitimate

influence on us. Now, what is the legitimate influence of 'belief in the truths God's word reveals? It tells me I am a fallen sinner—a truth my own experience corroborates. It tells me that as such I am exposed to dreadful danger, yet Christ has opened a way of safety. Now, the legitimate effect of faith in these truths will be to lead me to turn from the danger toward the safety. A man's belief in the truths of God's word is beginning to have its legitimate effect when it leads to repentance. Still, when the soul takes this step, a new phenomena presents itself. He finds a power dragging him down toward evil—condemnation. He finds distrust of God. He does not love God. How is all this to be changed? Here we come to the exercise of what is usually called saving faith. Christ offers a cure on the simple condition of trust. Faith is not only believing Christ can and is willing, but is actually placing the soul in His hands for a cure, and trusting Him for that cure now. Still many persons, perhaps, must realize at some time a great difficulty in performing the act of faith which links the soul to Christ. This arises in many cases from unwillingness to give up something that must be sacrificed. All a sham. In other cases, from an actual difficulty of believing that God will forgive offences so

great and so oft repeated. We find it so difficult to cease judging God by ourselves. But we must remember God is not governed in His disposition toward us as our fellow-men are. "His thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor His ways as our ways." Or the difficulty arises from expecting the result of faith before the act of faith has been performed. "If I felt so and so, I could believe."

"To you that believe He is precious." The original means "of value." He is precious from the very fact of their believing in Him. Faith, as I have endeavoured to explain it, implies committing our eternal interests into the hands of Christ. Let a man invest all his funds in a certain undertaking, and that undertaking becomes precious to him from that circumstance. In travelling, you can tell in what a man has money invested by watching him when he receives the morning paper. He will look first to that column where he will find the price of that in which he is interested. A wife, at marriage, places her interests in the hands of her husband. Her future for joy or sorrow is linked to his. If he rises, so does she. If he fails, she fails with him. From that circumstance he will be to her from that hour what no one else is. In the hour when we believed in Christ, we linked our destinies to

Him. From the fact that we have placed everything in His hands He becomes precious to us. In fact, this very figure of marriage is used with reference to Christ and His Church. He is the bridegroom—the Church is the bride. How could He be other than precious to the believer? The believer's interests are more closely united to Christ than to any other. Christ says, "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." How close our relationship to the members of our own families! How many the ties that bind us! To most men you could not offer a greater insult than to speak a word against father or mother; yet the ties that bind the believer to Christ are closer, stronger. Let a man join a political party—work, canvass for it. Just in proportion to the amount of interest he has taken will he feel that his reputation is at stake with that of the party. Sharply criticise any act of the party, and see how quickly he becomes annoyed. The fact that he has recommended it—bound his interests up with it—makes it precious to him. But more particularly is Christ precious to the believer for what He has done for us, and the love He has shown to us. "We love Him because He first loved us." There is nothing so calculated to call forth affection as affection. There was a great

deal of wisdom said to be given by a little child when asked "why every one seemed to love her." Her reply was, "I don't know, unless it is because I love every one." I have read of a son who had quarrelled with his father. He believed his father hated him, and he hated his father. At length the father sickened and died. The son came and saw the corpse, cold and still in death, but not a tear did he shed. He attended the funeral. Heard the earth rumble on the coffin-lid—"earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust"—but no emotion was seen on his face. He came to hear the will read. He heard read, "I will and bequeath" to this one and to that one so much, until at last it was read, "I will and bequeath to my son William,"—then he broke down. He never thought his father cared for him, and the evidence that his father really thought of him touched his hard heart—moved the fountains of feeling within him. So Christ is precious to His people, because of the evidence of His love, although they are so unworthy of it. There is no one who has given us stronger proof of love than Christ has—no one who has such claim on our love. There is no class loved more than mothers, and rightly so—there are none to whom we owe so much. How many times have they neglected their own wants in attending to ours? How many sleep-

less nights ! What anxiety ! What solicitude ! How unfaltering the devotion ! Yet Christ has loved His people with more than a mother's love. Love led Him to forsake a throne in heaven—to spend nights in prayer—love wrung the sweat as it were drops of blood from His body, till it fell to the ground—love caused Him to give His life a ransom for us. We never can measure the love of Christ to us. St. Paul uses in one place what seems like a strong expression : “ If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha.” (Let him be accursed.) Yet when we think of the claims of the Saviour, we realize that which justifies the expression. He must be a wretch indeed who does not love his mother, who has done so much for him. Yet what shall we say if he love not Him who has done more ?

Two years ago, I remember reading of an heroic girl giving her life for her little brother. He had fallen through the ice. She heard his cries, or in some way became aware of his position, and ran to his rescue ; but in attempting to save him the ice broke, and she was precipitated into the river. Clinging to the ice, she told her little brother to climb up over her and escape. He did so, but she was drowned. What would you say of that brother if he grows to manhood and has no affection

for his sister—could even speak slightly of her? Yet Christ has given his life for us. We sometimes hear it asked what a moral person, who is destitute of the religion of Christ, lacks? "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed." They love Him for what He has wrought in them. Before they believed in Him there was guilt—condemnation. Now there is no condemnation. "Being justified by faith, they have peace with God." He has given them truer happiness than they ever knew before—a well-spring of joy. No matter how dark the day, there is always a bright spot to the believer. No matter how dire the calamity, everything is not swept from the believer. Christ is precious to them because, by believing, their eyes are opened to see the loveliness of His character. To the unbeliever there is no form nor comeliness; no beauty that they should desire Him. To the believer He is the fairest among ten thousand, and the one altogether lovely. Their characters are assimilated to His. They are prepared to appreciate Him. We love those whose characters or dispositions are like our own. Have you never found persons who are enchanted with the oratory of some one for whom you feel no especial admiration? His mode of thinking, or his feeling, was so different from your own, that you lacked a bond of sympathy.

He cannot call forth a response from you because of that dissimilarity. He grows impassioned in eloquence, or waxes indignant in denouncing some great wrong, or pathetic in describing some great sorrow; but the only effect on you is, perhaps, to excite a laugh of wonder, or, perchance, a smile of contempt. There are some great writers that others are fond of whom you do not appreciate. So among your friends—you love those most who feel as you do—who can enter into sympathy with you. The believer has passed through a change by which he is brought into sympathy with Christ. He loves purity; in Christ he sees spotless purity; in Christ he finds the perfection of all he loves and longs for. It is the affection of kindred minds that is strongest. We love Him because our hopes are centred in Him. When the gathering darkness of death comes around, and earthly friends must leave us—when sight grows dim and hearing has left us, we expect Him never to leave us—we expect Him to buoy our heads in Jordan's chilly waves.

II. In what respects is He precious? His name is precious. It brings joy and peace. We love His cause. His cause is ours. We will do what we can to help it forward. We will be grieved when any one brings dishonour on it. We will love His people because they love Him.

You have felt attached to a man because you found him attached to some friend of yours. You cannot more surely recommend yourself to that mother than by telling her of your love for her son who has passed away. We feel we have a bond of sympathy with all who love Jesus. Our union with Christ has brought us into sympathy with them. Our different degrees of refinement may separate us—our different education and views; but still there remains a very strong bond. "By this shall all men know that ye are His disciples." We will love His word—there His character is depicted—there His will is made known—there His promises are recorded. We will love fellowship with Him. Is Jesus precious to you? What evidence do you give of it?

IX.

Religion Reasonable.

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord ; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”—*Isaiah* i. 18.

MERCY is God's delight. Judgment is his strange work. Through the darkest clouds of wrath that gather over the heads of men in this world there are gleams of the light of mercy. In this chapter there are scathing denunciations and awful rebukes for a people who had offered great insult to God by their sins and frequent rebellion. Yet where will you find a more tender or pathetic invitation or a more gracious promise than the words of our text contain ? The word of God scarcely presents stronger encouragement to the flagrant sinner. How many a despairing soul has been cheered, how many a scarlet-dyed sinner has been led to penitence and prepared for pardon by these words !

“How amazing the condescension as well as

the mercy of God!" saith the Lord. These are the words of the Creator to the creature. If there is a controversy between two nations, we expect the weaker to make the first overtures of peace. After late victories we would have been surprised if Russia had been the first to make overtures of peace, or proposals for a conference. Yet God, the Creator, proposes to hold conference with his sinning creature to reason the case with him. God seems to lay His majesty aside, to overlook the infinite distance between Himself and His creature man. He condescends to reason the case with him. It was condescension for God to talk with His creature in the days of his innocence. How much more in the time of his deepest guilt and darkest rebellion to offer to reason with him! Again, man is manifestly in the wrong when God invites him to come and reason with Him. If we have a disagreement with a fellow, and we regard him as wrong, we are apt to say "he is wrong; I am right. It is his place to make the first advances." But God, the holy, just One, makes the first advances. How wonderful the condescension!

I. *Men who are living in sin* ought to be prepared to give a reason. Surely it is beneath the dignity of a being endowed with intelli-

gence to pursue a course contrary to reason, or without reason. In matters of worldly business men do not do this. Even if, at times, they do adopt a course that is unreasonable, it is because they do not see it to be so. They try to use their intelligence. Go to any man doing business in the village, and you will find he is endeavoring at least to be guided by his intelligence in this matter. You may differ from him in your views about the way in which the business ought to be managed, and may tell him so, and you will find him, if you approach him courteously and are prepared to discuss the matter intelligently, quite willing to argue the case with you. He may be wrong, but he is not ashamed at least to maintain that he is governed by reason. He has probably thought it over many times. He has studied it quietly by himself. He has discussed it with his associates. He has read whatever books he could find on the subject. But with reference to religion, you may find in the village, probably, many men who would not for a moment pretend to be governed by reason. It is a strange fact, yet I believe an established fact, many men have laid their reason aside with reference to spiritual things. "My people doth not consider," was God's complaint of His ancient people; and might it not

justly be brought against many now? Reason, the hand that should hold the helm of man's bark across the sea of life, is thrown overboard, and caprice or feeling now holds the helm. Ask many men, "Why do you not attend to this matter?" and in a majority of cases the reply is, "I don't feel like it." Feeling was given us as a stimulus, as a propelling power, not as a guide. It is well for a man in any right undertaking when he has the stimulus of feeling to help him. It is a pity when a man's hands are engaged in a work in which his heart and feeling are not engaged—worse still when his feeling is directly opposed to him. Yet every successful man has sometimes to push his work without feeling—sometimes in the face of feeling. He first settles the question, "Ought I to engage in it? Will it pay? Does my business require it?" Then he engages in it. If he feels like it, it is well; if he does not, it is his misfortune. And his will rises to the task without feeling—perhaps in opposition to feeling. Why not act in the same way with reference to spiritual things? Why, but because man in these matters is astray. How many men are there who have calmly, quietly studied this matter, and resolved that reason should lead them to act according to the best light they could get. My hearers, sin is an unreasonable

thing. It will not bear the investigation of reason. It will not even submit to the tests of common sense. Let a man, before committing an act of sin, retire and take with him his Bible, his conscience, his experience, his reason. Let him use his skill in arguing for sin, and give their full force to all the arguments—let then common sense present the case against, and reason must give in a decision adverse to sin. It will take a skilful lawyer, indeed, to make out a case for any sin in the court where reason is allowed to speak for God and right, and where conscience is the judge. You cannot defend any bad action by good reasons. Sin is folly, is madness as well as crime. Sin is an offence against human reason as well as against the divine law. Two weeks ago, in speaking of the prodigal, we noticed that his repentance is called, "Came to himself." All along up to that time, feeling, evil desire had held the rein, and had been driving on furiously, madly, in pursuit of liberty, of happiness, of satisfaction. He intended to start for a country where no galling yoke was on the people's neck—where all those fierce desires of his youthful heart would find full and constant satisfaction. When he gave the reins to desire, he travelled rapidly. He soon reached the "far country." But the rapidity with which he travelled only made it

so much the worse, for it was exactly in the wrong direction, and the "far country" was the very antipodes of the country he intended to reach. In the experience of the prodigal in the "far country," we see the result of laying reason aside, and of taking feeling, or desire, as the guide in spiritual matters. And similar results must always follow such a foolish course. Nor is this to be wondered at. If a man in his business should lay reason aside, and let his desires guide him, how soon would financial ruin be the consequence! There are many bankrupt to-day, because they did not hold their desires in check by reason. Yet the wildest and most visionary schemes of speculators are not, in their unreasonableness, to be compared with the course of a man who, while professing to believe the Bible, yet persistently lives a life of sin. The business man thinks he is following a reasonable course; and if his judgment is not very sound or clear, perhaps he is not responsible; but for the man believing God's word, yet going deliberately on in sin, there is no such excuse. He cannot even pretend to be guided by reason. I speak now of those who accept the Bible; and I say those living in sin are pursuing an unreasonable course. They do not think or reason. They dare not. They shut their eyes to consequences, and plunge

in and risk consequences. Either in worldly or in spiritual matters, the man who pursues a course that he is unwilling to submit to reason is on the road to ruin. You know that it is so in worldly matters, and it is just as true in spiritual matters. Yet there is not a reason for living in sin that will bear the light of day. Am I not talking to some who are pursuing this foolish course? If you wish to realise the truth of what I say, let me ask you to take a few hours. Retire from the world. Think the matter calmly over. Write down all the excuses and reasons for a life of sin which you can invent. Then submit them to reason and conscience, enlightened by God's word. Do not hoodwink reason, or close your ears to any line of arguments. Cross out those that are worthless. Then see if you are willing to risk your soul on those that remain. Ask yourself, with these as my defence am I prepared to pass through the gates of death and go up to the throne of God? I think I can reverently say that God would listen to a good reason if such could be found. But, my friends, you could not find reasons even that would satisfy yourself. You must feel, the more you think of it, that every argument is only an excuse—lame and weak at that. And if our own poor weak reason and dimmed moral sense is not satisfied,

as surely the infinitely holy God will not be. Let me urge the claims of religion as reasonable claims, and object to sin as unreasonable. The service of sin requires a man to ignore his own intelligence—to go in opposition to his own reason. Whatever leads me to lay reason aside, degrades me. Self-respect should lead one to abandon a course that is unreasonable. Self-interest certainly should. An unreasonable course leads to ruin. O that I could persuade you to abandon a course which your reason condemns, and which experience proves ruinous!

II. The claims of God and of religion are reasonable claims. God is willing that, as far as human reason is capable of judging the claims of religion, the laws by which He governs men should be submitted to reason. I say, as far as it is necessary for us to know, and as far as we are capable of judging. I do not say that there are not mysteries in the divine government which the mightiest mind cannot fathom. There may be perplexities. But that is not to be wondered at. That the plans of the Infinite should reach away beyond the narrow region in which human thought is confined is surely to be expected. When the human mind has spent thousands of years exploring the divine government, there will still be regions beyond for eternal investigation. There are some that,

in our present ignorance, we cannot understand, yet which will all be plain in the future. And probably there is much we will never know. But I say that that part of the divine government which it is necessary for us to understand, and which we are capable of understanding, is evidently in agreement with the highest reason. Many of the brightest minds, that have spent years in the study of the divine government, have gladly joined in the chorus of the skies, "Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints." But there are and always have been proud men, who, with an arrogance that amounts to blasphemy, reject that in the divine government which they cannot understand. Because it is above human reason, they are ready to declare that it is contrary to human reason. There are those who reject or neglect religion, because there are mysteries connected with the past or the future which they cannot understand. There are mysteries connected with the origin of evil about which men have troubled themselves. There are difficulties connected with the future about which men have and still do trouble themselves. What is going to become of the millions who live and die in ignorance of the plan of salvation? Infidels scoff and sneer, and many learned men have racked their brains to construct theories to ex-

plain these mysteries. They may throw some light on these subjects, but, after all, there are mysteries just as dark as ever. But I console myself with this thought: we do not need to understand these things. If I can escape from having the guilt of sin hung as a millstone around my neck to sink me in perdition for ever, I need not trouble myself to know how it originated. If a man is awaked from his slumbers in a sinking ship, he will be anxious to secure a life-preserver or to get a place on the boat that is pushing off from the vessel's side. He certainly would not stand and say, "Now, I mean to understand just how this disaster originated before I take a single step to escape." Yet, this is the course of those who refuse to attend to religion because there are mysteries connected with the subject. First perform the duty which conscience and reason point out. It may be that from the shore of safety we will be permitted to review the past, and investigate more minutely the cause of the disaster. The claims of God and of religion are reasonable—are agreeable to our reason as far as we are capable of judging them. There are few men but will admit that submission to the claims of God's law in this life is right—that it promotes the interests of the individual and of society. Yet there are those who would excuse

themselves because of mysteries in the eternal future, or the eternal past. Imagine a traveller inquiring the way to a distant city he wishes to reach. The way is shown him, and, as far as he can see distinctly, it agrees in direction and other respects with the way he should travel. But he commences to object to the guide: "I shall not travel this way until you explain certain things to me. I must know how the road crosses a certain gorge farther back, and I must know how it crosses those mountains which seem to rise to the skies yonder in the distance." The reply, I think, would be: "As for the gorge farther back, that does not at all concern you; and as for the mountains that seem to shut up your way in the distance, it will be time enough for you to understand how the road crosses that when you get there." There are men who ought to be traveling the narrow way toward heaven, but who are troubling themselves about questions that never have been and perhaps never will be important for them to understand. If they do not bestir themselves and make haste, the darkness of an eternal night will settle around them. Then it will not matter to them whether the mysteries are unravelled or not. There is, I think, great danger on this point in these days. Men have been thinking about the question of eternal punish-

ment, and there are those who say it does not look reasonable. Now, I say this is one of the questions that is above human judgment. What the punishment of sin should be, surely we are not qualified to judge. The only question for us is, what has God said? Whether it agrees with the views of men whose judgments are, compared with Infinite Wisdom, so weak—whose views are so narrow—is a small matter. In those parts of the divine plan which it is necessary for us to understand, and which we are capable of understanding, all is in agreement with reason. In those matters which are beyond our comprehension, it is presumption and rebellion for us to allow our weak reasons to rise in opposition to God. Just think of the absurdity and wickedness of man, who is but of yesterday, assuming to judge the decrees of the Almighty! “Who art thou, vain man, that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him who formed it, Why didst thou make me thus?” These things are not to be brought into the conference to which God invites His creatures. We are not to pretend to say what our sentence shall be if we continue in sin. Imagine a sovereign calling his rebellious subjects to a conference to settle what their punishment shall be! I can imagine a merciful king calling

rebellious subjects to a conference, in which he will unfold to them his merciful designs if they will submit and return to loyalty, but the other I cannot imagine.

I would not dare to stand here and attempt to explain away any doctrine of God's, even though it should appear to men unreasonable. God's wisdom and knowledge are infinite. There are heights to which the human mind in an eternity cannot soar. There are depths to which the human mind in an eternity cannot fathom. There are breadths o'er which in an eternity the human mind cannot travel. How presumptuous for man, who appeared but yesterday, and will be gone to-morrow, whose range of thought is so narrow and limited, and so liable to err even in those narrow limits, to assume to prejudge the justice of God!

Then some one will say, "You would impose barriers in the way of investigation; you would muzzle inquiry." No, I place no bounds to human investigation but such as God has. Let men push their inquiries as long as they have clear light and firm ground on which to tread. But when they enter the mists where all is uncertain, let them not dare to oppose their guesses and conjectures to the word of the Lord, which is tried.

But I have been led away by a current of

thought which is sweeping through Christendom to-day. I have said that a course of sin is an unreasonable course. God uses various methods to bring men to feel this. God reasons with men in His word. The reasoning is simple, yet powerful. With reference to those truths which it is essential for us to understand, the argument is so simple that the most untutored can understand it; yet so powerful, that all ought to be moved by it. A clear light is shed on the way of duty, and motives of infinite importance urge us along that way. God reasons with men by His providence, and through their experience. The argument from human experience is, that the history of individuals and of nations proves that it is an evil and a bitter thing to sin against God; therefore, we are to pass by it. Perhaps the lines of appeal may be classified as follows:—He appeals to our gratitude; to our sense of justice; to our self-love.

God reasons with us to serve Him on the ground of gratitude. An argument of this kind is addressed to each of us every day. He appeals to you by the glad light of these beautiful spring days; He appeals to you by the bounties with which He has spread your table to-day—by all the enjoyments of life which are His gifts—by the health which enables you to participate in all these

enjoyments. But the strongest appeal to your gratitude is in His word, where He tells you of His infinite gift and boundless love. How all these things tell us of His love! Surely, One who loves us so has a claim on our love and our obedience. O, it seems to me the argument of love, the appeal to your gratitude, should reach you—should move the most obstinate, and soften the most obdurate. It is said that years ago, before the abolition of slavery, a wealthy gentleman from the North was traveling through the slave states. At New Orleans he happened to be present at an auction of slaves. He there saw a young mulatto woman awaiting her turn to be sold, weeping. He inquired the cause, and she replied that "she had been the slave of a kind master, but he had died, and now she was to be sold, and she knew not who her master might be." He inquired the price, and was told it was \$600, or something like that. He thought, "It is a large sum, but liberty is of more value to that girl." So he paid the price. He went and told her; gave her money to take the steamer and go North, where she would be free. Again she burst into tears. He inquired the cause, and found they were tears of gratitude. She wished to go North with him, and serve his wife and children all her days. The servitude she dreaded under a harsh

tyrant, she was willing voluntarily to take upon herself under a kind master. If it is a sin to transgress the laws of One who has a right to rule over us, it is a greater sin to transgress His laws when He loves us, and all His laws promote our interests. Every fresh proof of God's love is a fresh proof of our sinfulness if we disobey Him ; every fresh proof of God's love is a fresh reason why we should turn from sin.

He appeals to our sense of justice. He is our Creator, and surely has a right to rule His creatures. "Hath not the potter power over his own clay?" He is our Provider ! From His storehouse come all our supplies. He has but to speak, and the streams of blessing would all dry up. Surely He who feeds us, who supports us, has a right to govern us.

He also appeals to our self-interest. Every promise of future reward, every threatening of future punishment, is an appeal to our self-love ; every pang that comes to the sinner from remorse of conscience ; every misery that comes to the licentious from disease of body ; every effort to reform that is overcome by the strength of evil habit, is a voice reasoning with us, saying to us, "It is an evil." He that sinneth against God wrongs his own soul ; therefore, turn from it.

The promises of the Word are an inspiration of hope, and an argument for repentance. What a strong reason for repentance and submission to God there is in the promise of my text to-night! As long as a man fears he will not be forgiven, though the arguments for amendment may be strong, he may refuse. He may say, "It is no use; I know I am wrong; but I have sinned so long, I cannot be forgiven." There are various refuges of lies which Satan has constructed to shield men from the arrow of conviction—the force of the reasoning God employs. This is usually the last resort. As long as a man is living carelessly, Satan whispers, "Ye shall not surely die. There is no such great danger. Sin is not such an awful thing, and God is merciful." But the force of the Divine reasoning begins to be felt, and the man begins to realize that sin is an awful thing, and conscience whispers of the justice of God and of the awful punishment of sin. Then Satan constructs another refuge—another defence: "It is too late; you have sinned too long; you may just as well sin on and make the most of it." My text comes to-night and demolishes this last defence, and leaves you without excuse. It is unreasonable for you to go on in sin, for it brings disaster to the soul here and hereafter. It is unreasonable, because it is a transgression

of the laws of a lawful King—unreasonable, for it arrays you, a weak mortal, against the Omnipotent Jehovah, because He must, if you persist in opposing Him, lift His almighty arm in punishing you—unreasonable, because you may escape these awful consequences by turning.

Scarlet sins! Surely they are those of the men who have sinned against the clearest light. Scarlet is the colour most difficult to remove; yet the mercy of God reaches those farthest off—it stoops to those lowest down. We delight to speak of the mercy of God, and in the Word we have wonderful representations of it; but I am afraid men sometimes get impressions of a mercy that would interfere with justice. There is no conflict between justice and mercy. They are both attributes of the Divine Being. Anything which lessens our view of the awfulness of sin and the inflexibility of justice, lessens our view of the value of pardon. The teacher who always pardons every offence will have his authority despised, and his constant clemency will be despised too. Men talk of the mercy of God, as though God could at any time, and without any satisfaction, forgive sin if He saw fit. I do not know that. Justice is an attribute of God as well as mercy. God cannot do wrong. Let us beware how we undervalue an offer of

divine mercy. The offer of our text is one that we believe has cost the blood of the Son of God. By the infinite cost of this pardon, as well as by the unreasonableness of sin, I urge you to accept the offer. If you reject it, you reject what all the gold of earth cannot purchase. I urge you to turn now. I speak as unto wise men. If your judgment is convinced; if your interests would lead you to repent; if your eternal destiny may hang on the decision of the hour, "how long halt ye?"

Epistles, Written and Studied.

“Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men ; forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God ; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.”—2 Cor. iii. 2, 3.

ONE of the strongest arguments for Christianity is the fruit it bears. “By their fruits ye shall know them,” is a text not only that may be applied to teachers, but to their teaching. The system of religion that bears the best fruit must be the best system. Taken on the large scale, no system of religion has brought forth better fruit than has Christianity. The missionary of the Cross to-day, in visiting heathen lands, can point back to Christian lands, to the beneficial effects of the Gospel manifest there, and say, “These are our letters of recommendation ;” or “These are the credentials of Christianity as she comes and claims acceptance of you.” The Apostle here refers to the Corinthians as evidence of the benefit of his labours.

They, in the great change that had come over them through his preaching, were his letters of recommendation. "Ye are our epistle, read and known of all men." Your transformed lives, which are seen of all men, are our recommendation as we pass from place to place. A man the fruits of whose work has been seen by men all around, does not need to carry a certificate of his ability about. His work speaks for itself. Happy the minister who can see the fruit of his preaching in the godly lives of his people—who can see the seed spring up and bring forth a glorious harvest—who can see seals to his ministry all around—who can see God's stamp of approval affixed to his ministry in the conversion of the ungodly—in the quickening development and maturing of Christian character of his people—in their honesty in business—in their charity, purity, kindness—in their deepening interest in all that relates to the kingdom of Christ in this world! Happy the community where these epistles of Christ are found, and read and known of all men! Yet Paul does not speak boastfully, or represent himself as the sole agent in this work. He is but the servant. Christ and the Holy Spirit are really the effective agents. "Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us." An epistle is a means of conveying the thoughts

or wishes of the writer to the parties to whom it is sent. Christian lives are a means used by God for conveying His designs, His wishes to the world, and one of the most effective ways. The best translation of the Scriptures, one has said, is the translation into men's lives. Thousands will not read the Scriptures written with ink, but they will read them written on the heart, written in character. Many will not come to church to hear a sermon, who cannot escape that most powerful sermon preaching, a consistent life. "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God."

We would notice here that there are three agents concerned in writing this epistle. Christ is the author, the inditer; Paul is the instrument in Christ's hand ("ministered by us"); the Holy Spirit makes the epistle legible. Further, we wish to show you three marks that ought to characterize an epistle—clearness, unity or consistency, and strength. We wish further to speak to you of three places where the epistles are read—in the business world, in the social circle, and in the home. I. The agents. II. The characteristics. III. The places where it is read.

I. The Author of the epistle is Christ. Christian life ought to be to the world a representation of the wishes, the thoughts of

Christ. While our hearts are to receive the impress of Christ's will, and our lives are, so to speak, the parchment where men are to read that will, we are not passive. We become epistles only by consent. Our lives are not formed in a certain mould, and stamped with certain characters independently of our will. The word of Christ dwells in us, and is manifest through us; the ministrations of His servants are effectual to us, and the impress of the Spirit is received by us only so far as we are willing. As this is so, it is necessary that we should have correct ideas of the will of Christ, which is to be made known by us. The will of the Gospel of Christ is to be transcribed into our lives. We must study that Gospel—make ourselves familiar with it. We must have correct ideas of the scheme of redemption. Then we must incorporate the truths we have learned in our lives. A mere intellectual impression of the truth does not enable us to become epistles read and known. We must live the truth we know. For example, Christ, in His sermon on the Mount, uttered what is called the beatitudes. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," he said. Now, it is possible for us to proclaim that beatitude over again in our lives. So of each of the others. By being poor in spirit, meek, hungering after righteousness or desir-

ing spiritual food—by being merciful, pure in heart—by being peace-makers and not peace-destroyers, we may exhibit, in a form which all men may see, the blessedness of these traits. Our lives will be epistles of Christ to the world only so far as we get our ideas of life from Christ. Here is where the epistles of Christ to the world are distorted and changed, so as to fail to give a real representation of His will. Christians to-day are incorporating a great deal into their lives not found in the teaching of Christ. If, in transcribing an author, the transcriber should incorporate and try to amalgamate with it sentiments from other authors, it would not be fair to represent the result as the teaching of the author he professed to transcribe. There are few Christians whose lives are a correct representation to the world of the will of Christ, because there are few Christians really who accept the teaching of Christ on all points. This charge may appear to you severe and unjustifiable, but look at it calmly. Take the teaching of Christ with reference to forgiving injuries. It is, I think, a fact that many Christians do not even very seriously try to follow the teaching of Christ. As a consequence, their lives are an imperfect representation of the will of Christ in that respect. Again, take the teaching of Christ

with reference to meekness and humility. Are there not many, even professed Christians, who think a man unmanly so far as he is meek? Here again is an imperfect and an untrue representation of the mind of Him who is the Author of the epistle written in the heart. Again, is it not the teaching of Christ that he is really the greatest man who does the most service? "Whosoever will be great among you shall be your minister, and whosoever of you will be the chiefest shall be servant of all." When men show the road to greatness, they show a steep and slippery path, where men ascend largely by pulling their fellows down; but when Christ shows the road to greatness, He points to the way that leads down through the humble vale of service—a road where men become great by helping others up. Have not the majority of professing Christians either misunderstood or failed rightly to represent the will of Christ in this respect? Here is a point where we will do well to be careful that we represent the teaching of Christ aright. Let the epistle written in our lives, which men are reading daily, not misrepresent the Master here.

Again, let me say, that if our lives are to be faithful epistles from Christ to the world, we must be impressed with the importance of His teaching. The teaching of Christ on many

points is contrary to the course of this world (as in the points I have referred to), and because of that, it will be difficult for us to transcribe it into our lives or to live it. It is not enough that we be convinced of the truth of the teachings of Christ—our lives will continue to misrepresent them, even after we believe them true, unless we are deeply impressed with their importance. One business of the minister, who is one instrument used by Christ, is to impress the minds of men with the importance of the truth. It seems to me this is one of the chief ways in which the epistles of Christ are to be written by us on your hearts. In these days most men are theoretically acquainted with the truth. You do not need so much a man to explain as to enforce the truth—keep its importance before your minds. By appeals to conscience, to your hopes and fears, he is to stir you to live the Gospel—to take of the things of Christ and show them to men—to urge by all lawful motives that men follow the teaching of Christ—to reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. The preacher is to be an amanuensis for Christ, in writing the epistles in men's hearts. But all our efforts, joined to the efforts of those to whom we minister, will only produce a blurred misrepresentation if alone. There is another Agent—an

Agent absolutely essential that the epistle may be legible—"written," says the Apostle, "not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God." The tables of the law were written by the finger of God on tables of stone; the law of this dispensation is written by the Spirit of God on the fleshy tables of the heart. All efforts of preachers to impress the truths of the Gospel, to induce men to live their religion, will fail—all efforts of men to live as God's law prescribes are failures, until the Spirit writes the law on the heart. When the Spirit writes the law within, the life becomes an epistle of Christ, "read and known of all men." You have tried to live so that your life would bear witness for Christ. But as you have looked back on the records of the past, you have found them so blotted by sins, so obscured by inconsistency, that you have felt ashamed of it. There are many people who are failing here; they do not give that prominence to the work of the Spirit which they ought. Struggling in their own strength, they find many things in life that turn them aside. Their testimony is not clear. Their hearts seem less susceptible of receiving and making known the law of God than did the tables of stone of old. Is there any way by which our characters may be made to receive the impress of Christ's will? I

answer, Yes. The Spirit of God can do it. God has promised to do it for His people. Ezekiel's prophecy was, "I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh." Jeremiah said, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." When a man thus has the law by the Spirit written within, his whole life will witness for Jesus—will be an epistle of Jesus to men. Have you ever seen one who had submitted fully to the Spirit's impress? How the life from that time speaks for Christ. The very face seems stamped with a message of glad tidings. The eyes beam with the love of Jesus. The tongue becomes as the pen of a ready writer to make known the power of Jesus. The hands are employed for Jesus—the feet hurry along the narrow way. The whole life is an epistle of Jesus to men. The Spirit, in various ways, makes the writing of Jesus legible. Sometimes the fiery trial brings out the graces. I have seen a piece of apparently blank paper held near the flames, when writing has appeared, brought out by the heat. So, by the fire of affliction, has the work of Jesus in men's hearts been made manifest. Can men see, in your lives, a testimony for Jesus? I pass to notice the three characteristics that should mark an epistle.

(a) Clearness. An epistle should not be ambiguous—should not be capable of two meanings. You frequently read sentences capable of two interpretations. Perhaps you have seen whole paragraphs of that kind, so indefinite you scarcely knew what they meant. The same ought to characterize the epistle written in your hearts. It should be clear—definite. Men seeing you from day to day should not be in uncertainty as to your convictions—not in uncertainty whether you have any convictions or not. Your life should give no uncertain sound. If there is need of definiteness in the teaching of the pulpit in these days, there is also need of clearness in the teaching of the life. A pulpit not clear in its teaching on the great fundamental doctrines will not have much influence on men. So a life that leaves men uncertain whether the rewards and punishments of eternity—the promises and threatenings of God's word—the existence of heaven and hell are believed in by us, is not an epistle for Christ. It will not be necessary for us to make a parade of our opinions or a show of our religion. Where the law has been clearly written in the heart, it will clearly manifest itself in the life. My friends, clearness in the experience gives clearness to the testimony of the life. A clear experience is the only thing

that will enable a man's life to be a perfectly clear epistle for Christ. An epistle that is clear will produce a definite impression—will be more easily remembered—will be more likely to have an effect than one that is indefinite. Haze and clouds in one's experience is apt to give indefiniteness to one's testimony. If we look back on our own experience, and ask ourselves what Christian examples have had the most influence on us, I think we will find it is that of persons who walked in the light—whose testimony had the ring of assurance in it. Scores of Christians we have met and mingled with have left no particular impression on us—have given no particular impulse to us, because their experience was not clear. Away back in childhood's day, we remember the experience of a teacher in the Sabbath-school, so full of calm, of assurance, so definite in its testimony of pardon, of the cleansing power of Jesus' blood. Though she has long since gone home, it has left a clear, defined memory with me, and has, I think, been a stimulus, and furnished a goal of experience to which I aim. It has been one of the factors that have entered into my ideal of a Christian. There was nothing demonstrative, but quiet, modest, unobtrusive; yet the clearness has left a memory and an influence through a score of years—will leave a memory and an

influence while life lasts. Would you have an influence for Christ that will last when you are gone? It may be you have no great talent. You are unsuited in many ways for producing an impression on society. Yet the Spirit of God can give you an experience so clear, so definite, so marked, that you may have an influence which, others of higher position, of greater talent, can never wield. What Christian has not read "The Dairyman's Daughter," written by a clergyman of the Church of England, of a Methodist—though he does not mention that? It has shed a fragrance that has floated out through the Christian world. It has, with its touching simplicity, woven a network of attraction that has drawn many a reader to Christ. She was not eminently fitted by talent to wield such an influence, but her clear, sweet, definite experience, apparently, first attracted the attention of the clergyman, and induced him to write the experience for the world. In our social means of grace, the experience that lingers in memory with us is the one that was clear; so in the business of life men bear testimony. There are ways in which, without intending it, men get an intimation of your inner life. It is well when this is clear.

(b) An epistle should be marked by unity, or consistency. The teaching of one part

must not contradict that of another. This is important in the epistle written in your life. The teaching of some men's life seems clear. Their experience seems definite enough. They can tell you where and when they were converted, and how it came about; but the life is not consistent with the testimony. One part does not agree with another. On Sunday the teaching of the life seems orthodox enough, but on the week-day it is of quite a different kind. The other world first on Sunday; this world first in the week. The moral law is a Sunday standard; the customs and maxims of the world are the week-day standard. "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" is the question on Sunday. "Business, pleasure, what will ye have me to do?" is the question during the week. They seem possessed of two characters, and can assume either to suit the occasion. Friends, one of the greatest paralyzers of Christian influence is inconsistency. Before our lives can be epistles for Jesus, in which men will read His mighty power and mighty love, the testimony of our lips and the testimony of our lives must be made to harmonize. An inconsistent Christian frequently does work for the devil and leads souls astray. A ship's crew found themselves out in their reckoning—astray from the course they desired to

follow. On searching, the cause of the error was found. The carpenter had driven a nail near the compass. The nail had influenced the direction of the needle. That on which they were depending for guidance became a snare, and might have led them on the rocks. So many a professor to whom the world looks, and has a right to look, for an example, by inconsistency may become a snare. Let us aim to make our lives a consistent epistle for Jesus.

(c) And here, my friends, I would observe that the third characteristic of an epistle is strength. Clearness and consistency add to the strength. Yet you have seen men whose lives are consistent, whose testimony is clear, yet who are feeble. No one doubts their sincerity—no one denies their consistency—but there is no force. They do not act earnestly, energetically, in spiritual things. We want to show men that we are terribly in earnest. Energy depends somewhat on natural character. Some men, when unconverted, are ringleaders in sin—apparently cannot be anything else. So, when converted, we look for the same force of character to show itself; and if a man has a great deal of energy in worldly matters, and is a drone spiritually, it is a suspicious circumstance. Some men, when unconverted, are very energetic in anything they undertake. But religious

energy does not depend altogether on natural character, but on the amount of grace. Your natural character cannot be altered, but the amount of grace can be. If there is a defect in the construction of a steam-engine which prevents its effectiveness, you cannot, it may be, alter that, but you can alter the amount of steam. So while the natural character may be almost unalterable, the amount of grace is not. And the grace of God would put energy into many a sluggish Christian, and unloose many a stammering tongue, and warm many a cold heart. It would enable many, who now consider themselves unable, to take up the cross and speak a word for Jesus. Let the testimony of your life be clear, and consistent, and strong for Jesus. If every Christian's life testimony was of that kind, what an influence there would be in the Church! We notice, in the last place, where these epistles are read—

III. They are read in the business world. There are many business men who never read the epistles of the Apostles, but they cannot help but read the epistles written in the heart and manifested in the life. Their sharp, criticising eyes are on the professing Christian. Doubtless, many times they are prejudiced against Christians and Christianity. They are disposed to find fault. Imperfections they magnify into

sins. Ordinary prudence and energy they consider evidence of the same selfishness and worldliness which govern themselves. While this is the case, we should be careful to give them no just cause of complaint. They have a right to expect honesty, truthfulness, straightforwardness in the Christian. A Christian man, if his life among business men is to bear witness for Christ, must utterly reject anything like duplicity or sharp practice, by which so many in business take advantage of the necessities or the ignorance of others. The conduct of the Christian business man should be such, that all candid men could see he is governed by right principles. Recreancy to strict integrity and truthfulness, we have reason to believe, is too common in the business transactions of the day. Men plead that they must do as others do, or fail. Such an excuse should be insufficient for the Christian. The strongest allurements in worldly gain is not a sufficient cause for the slightest infringement of the moral law. It doubtless requires firmness—it doubtless requires sacrifice; and if Christians strictly adhere to honesty and truthfulness, doubtless sometimes they will have the mortification of seeing others, for the time, apparent gainers by their conscientiousness; but we must remember, if there were no temptation to wrong-doing, there would

be no virtue in right-doing. In the cars we sometimes see little racks containing Bibles. For the convenience of those disposed to read it is useful. As a warning and a rebuke to the wicked it is useful. It would be well if in every shop and grocery store there could be a Bible kept. It might help to purify business. But best of all is the epistle written by the Spirit of God on the heart, and manifest by the grace of God in the life. Get your hearts filled with the grace of God. Carry it with you into the business of life, and you will be an epistle for Christ. In spite of their captious criticism, men will feel that he has something which I have not. He walks as the voice of conscience within me tells me I ought to walk. Many a man has unconsciously, by his integrity, convinced others of their sinful condition.

Again, these epistles are read in the social circle. It is difficult to bear consistent witness for Christ in the business world. It is more difficult in the social circle. When a disposition to please and to be pleased prevails, to dissent from a friend on principle, to condemn what is wrong, to frown or uncharitable or unkindly remarks, requires even greater strength of principle than honesty in business. To place your Christianity first and your gentility second ; to be willing to offend the feelings or the false taste

of friends rather than offend God—in no point, perhaps, is it more necessary for us to be watchful—in no point, perhaps, are we more apt to be off our guard. We naturally relax in the social circle, and many a time the Christian appears to poorest advantage there. There has been a great deal of discussion about where a Christian may go. An easy method of deciding all cases is to go nowhere where you cannot take your religion with you. We find Christ accused by the Pharisees of being a friend to publicans and sinners. They were displeased to see Him go with them. It may be the publicans and sinners were just as much displeased to see Him go with the Pharisees; but wherever He went, He was faithful. The publicans and sinners were led to amendment by Christ's visiting them, and the proud Pharisee had his own evil heart unveiled by the guest that sat at his table. It might be considered ungentle, but Christ had a higher standard for conduct. So now, it does not matter so much where you go, if you are prepared to act the Christian there. Take your principles with you, and maintain them unimpaired by business temptations and by social blandishments. Thus will men see that you have been with Jesus. Religion was meant for all life's lawful employments and enjoy-

ments. It is a sad thing when it will not stand the tests that come in these.

The epistle will be read in the home. Strange as it may appear, I believe this the severest task of all. The little vexations and worries of life will entrap a man who has resisted the temptations of business and society, but fails more or at less home. It is well when those who know him best, who have an opportunity for careful scrutiny, see strong evidence of the working of the grace of God. It is a sad thing when a man fails here—when his children, who have a chance to read his motives pretty thoroughly, have no confidence in his religion.

Men look to professors as illustrations of the power of grace. They have a right to do so. They will see in us either evidence that will confirm the claims of Christ and Christianity, or that which will throw discredit on them. We who have been professed Christians occupy a responsible position. Let us strive by well-doing to put to silence those who would make false charges against us; that whereas they who strive to speak against us as evil-doers, may, by our good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Lukewarmness.

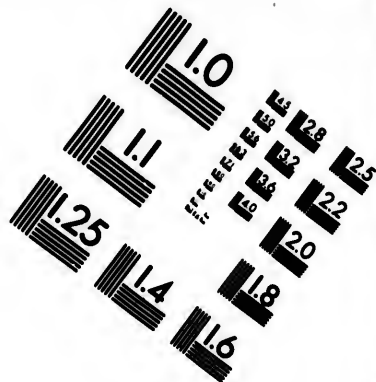
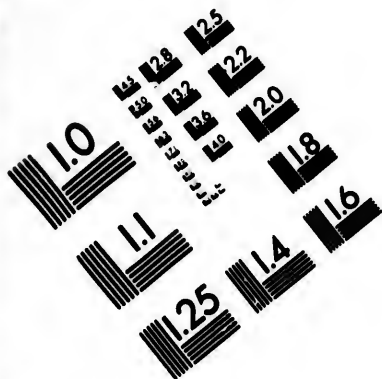
“So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.”—*Rev.* iii. 6.

ONE of the strongest proofs we have of human depravity is found in the tendency there is, even in those who have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, to backslide—to turn again to the weak and beggarly elements of the world, or at least to become cold and formal in religion. Even in the days of the Apostle John, while there still were some who had seen the Lord, while there still were some who had been baptized by the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, while miraculous gifts still continued to attest the divine presence, we see evidence of this tendency. In his epistles, dictated by the Spirit, to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor, he finds it necessary to administer reproof to several of them. Error was beginning to creep in. Some of them had forsaken their first love. But the state of none of the others seems so sad, so

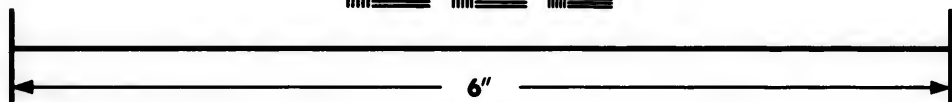
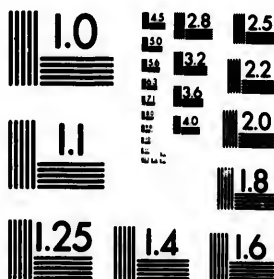
lamentable, as that of the Church at Laodicea. In the case of the other Churches commendation was mingled with reproof, or at least it was intimated that the reproof did not extend to all. In the case of the Church at Sardis the reproof was very sharp, but it was said "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy." But with reference to the Church at Laodicea there seems to have been no mitigating circumstance. There is no intimation that the picture drawn is not suited to the whole Church. They were neither cold nor hot—neither earnestly religious nor decidedly irreligious. No particular crimes are mentioned as blackening the character of the Church, no particular heresy as tarnishing the purity of her doctrines. No particular disease afflicted her, but a general languor and lassitude, a sort of spiritual decline had come over her. In the description here given of the Laodicean Church, many a modern Church may see her own character depicted. And if the description does not suit a Church as a whole, there are few modern Churches in which some of the members may not see a description of their character here. May we not all learn something from the description here given of the Church at Laodicea? Where is the

earnest zeal, that warm love that should mark us? We need frequently to examine ourselves lest this spiritual decline come over us. As we have no longer inspired men as of old standing in our midst to describe our characters, it is all the more needful for us frequently to examine ourselves by the Word and Testimony. We direct your attention this morning to the symptoms, the consequences, and the cure of lukewarmness.

I. *Symptoms.* One of the most common symptoms of this spiritual consumptive is *indolence* and *indifference*. There is usually remissness in performance of duty, and a general lack of interest in things spiritual. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot." This doubtless refers to their whole conduct. There is a tendency among us to attach too little importance to the outward life. Religion, it is true, has its seat in the heart, but it has its manifestation in the life. "By their fruit ye shall know them," said our Saviour—a rule which, while it does not authorize us to pass harsh or rash judgment on any, does authorize us to take the outward life in general as an indication of the state of the heart. But let us particularize. Attendance at the means of grace has been regarded as a duty by God's people. "Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together,"



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says the Apostle. Lukewarm Christians are usually marked by remissness in this duty. They will attend the house of God when there is some unusual attraction, but on ordinary occasions a very small circumstance will furnish them with an excuse for staying away. They come to the house of God not hungering for spiritual food, but looking for entertainment; and if they are not furnished with that by the preacher, or some circumstance in connection with the service, the hour drags tediously by. What wonder that they are easily detained from the house of God? They are somewhat indisposed, or the weather is somewhat unfavourable; or failing these excuses, they can read a better sermon at home. Quite true, perhaps; but the hearing of a sermon is not the only object of attendance on the sanctuary. We meet publicly and unitedly to worship God—publicly and unitedly to acknowledge our indebtedness to Him for past blessings, and our dependence on Him for future good—especially to ask for His spiritual blessing. There are promises specially made to the assemblies of God's people: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them;" "All with one accord were in one place." Where men are hungering and thirsting after righteousness, small obstacles will not keep them

from the house of God. They will come looking for spiritual food, and will not be disappointed. Times of spiritual prosperity are always marked by the increased interest of God's people in the means of grace. The attractive power of the cross draws men to the house of God. As a Church becomes lukewarm, the attractive power of the cross ceases; other means are used to take its place. Eloquence takes the place of unction. Human logic, the place of the demonstration of the Spirit. Eloquence and learning are not to be despised, but when we trust to them to do the work of the Spirit we are leaning on a broken reed. *Lack of interest in the prayer meeting and the class meeting*, the more social means of grace, is another symptom of lukewarmness. These means have always been highly valued by the pious in our Church. But the lukewarm have no conscious communion with God, and, what is more, no very keen desires for spiritual blessing. What wonder they feel no interest in the prayer meeting! As for class meeting, they have no news of fresh conquests—no glad experience of a Saviour's love. It is the old, old story of their conversion away in the distant past. Their conversion is the one little oasis in all the desert of their experience, and that they have long since passed, and now all

is cold, and dead, and barren. They have no living faith which enables them with joy to draw water from the wells of salvation. The blasting simoom of unbelief has swept over them, withering every plant of grace, and choking with its drifting sands every fountain of joy. Again, lukewarm Christians seldom converse about spiritual things. It is a sad comment on our religion that so little of the conversation among even professed Christians relates to the things concerning the kingdom of heaven. Is it not an evidence that we think little about these things?—for what we think most about we usually delight to talk about, at least where we find a congenial spirit. How many hours of social intercourse pass between professed Christians without one word about religion! Every other topic of importance, and some of but little importance, is discussed with interest and animation—religion seems a forbidden topic, and he who introduced it would be considered as displaying a lack of taste at least. But in the performance of the more private duties of the Christian life, especially, will lukewarmness show itself. Private prayer will be to the lukewarm little else but a form. They will know nothing of wrestling like Jacob with the Angel of the Covenant. Their prayers are few and short, and cold and languid, and

consequently unanswered. Nothing, perhaps, would surprise them so much as to receive an answer. Lukewarm Christians do not delight in perusing God's word. Its blessed truths have grown stale and tame to them. It is the Christian's chart across the ocean of life, but they do not study it. Its promises are a storehouse of strength, but they, though weak as other men, feel no need of strength, as they are not struggling against sin. The word of God contains the will of our Heavenly Father, and of the Christian's inheritance, and of his title to it. But the lukewarm places little value on that inheritance. If his title to an earthly inheritance were in doubt or dispute, he would be anxious; but about his title to a mansion in the skies, an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, he is little anxious. He seldom examines himself to ascertain his spiritual position. Like the Jew of old depending on his descent from Abraham, he depends on his connection with the Church. This is all the title he has to show—a title that will not be recognized at the gates of heaven. The lukewarm Christian feels little interest in the salvation of others. Professing himself to be walking in the way of life, he seems utterly careless whether others walk that way or not. His acquaintances—brothers, sisters, children—may be out of Christ,

but it gives him little concern. Perhaps by his carelessness and inconsistency he is standing in their way to life—a hindrance rather than a help. If a fellow-man is in danger from sickness, he is not slow to express solicitude and to offer help. If a friend has what he conceives wrong ideas with reference to politics, he will spend hours labouring to enlighten him. But with reference to spiritual matters, he says, by his conduct, “Let others do as they choose, I have as much as I can do to attend to myself.” But in addition to these sins of omission, there will usually be sins of commission. The command, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy,” is usually one of the first the lukewarm Christian violates. Sabbath visiting is indulged in. He sees no need for being so tight-laced. The Sabbath was intended as a day of rest, and he makes it a day of rest and of recreation, but he forgets to keep it holy. He reads the political newspaper, discusses parties, markets, prices, etc., and if nothing more interesting, the gossip or scandal of the day. His Sabbath is far from being an emblem of the rest that remains to the people of God. The lukewarm Christian has a great dread of being called a Puritan fanatic. He is easily, and in a sense Paul never thought of, “all things to all men”—pious with the pious, a worldling with the worldly. In

matters where his own views do not agree with the rules of the Church, he does not consider himself bound in conscience. If he does not transgress, he will go to the utmost length in countenancing amusements which are condemned by his Church. If he does not dance himself, he will not hesitate to encourage others to do so. A very common symptom of lukewarmness in a Church is unfriendliness or ill-feeling between Church members. Envy, jealousy, quarrelling, are ulcerous sores that show the diseased condition of the spiritual body. Love to one another is one of the proofs of discipleship. Where this is wanting, something must be wrong. These things are noised abroad in the world, and the Church is scandalized and her power paralyzed. This leads to another mark of a lukewarm Church—it is not a soul-saving Church. But all these symptoms, like the symptoms of bodily disease, point within. The physician will tell you that the hacking cough, the hectic flush, or pallid cheek, point to a weakness within; the lungs are disordered, or some of the vital organs are weak. Just so with these symptoms of spiritual disease. They tell of weakness within. The love of God is not shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, and love is the very life-blood of religion. The blood nourishes every part of the body. Any

disorder in the blood causes weakness throughout the entire system ; so where love grows cold, all the manifestations of the spiritual life soon commence to show it. The joy of the lukewarm is not joy in the Holy Ghost. They speak of a hope, but not bright and blooming ; not a star that lends its cheering light, and guides along life's pathway, like the star in the East pointed the way to the city where the Saviour dwelt, but an *ignis fatuus*, which leads to bewilder, and dazzle, and blind. They speak of faith ; but when closely examined it proves to be the counterfeit—presumption, and not the pure gold—faith. But the worst symptom is ignorance of their own state. You know that hidden dangers are the worst dangers. There may be rocks and shoals along that vessel's course, but if the captain knows it the danger is greatly lessened. Those diseases are most dangerous which make their way stealthily to the citadel of life. The young man pursues his work unsuspecting of the fact that disease is drinking up life's vital forces, and that the sappers are at work undermining his constitution, until all at once the terrible truth rushes upon him that consumption has fixed its unrelenting grasp on him. The lukewarm are frequently unwilling to know—like many persons with bodily disease, they are unwilling

to know the worst. They do not like to have the lamp of truth flash its light into the conscience with a—"Thou art the man!" Take an illustration. A company of men have crossed the plains towards the gold fields of the West. Winter overtakes them ere they reach their destination. Struggling through the mountain passes, down deep gorges, up steep ascents, climbing over rocks, one of their number, overcome with fatigue and numbed with cold, lays himself down, as he imagines, to rest. His companions realize his danger, and try to arouse him by presenting bright pictures of the golden treasures for which he left his home. All their efforts are met by a pettish request to be left alone. Numbness is commencing to seal up his senses. The chilled blood flows slowly through his veins, and Death, with his long icy fingers, is feeling for his heart-strings. Visions of his distant home, it may be, come flitting before his disordered fancy. He imagines himself seated by his own fireside, and his little prattling children clustering around his knee, while his wife prepares the evening meal. Thus, while the storm is covering him with sheets of purest white, he falls into a slumber—a slumber so deep that only the resurrection trump will arouse him. Is not this a picture of what frequently takes place in the Church? Allured

by the bright prospect placed before him in the Gospel, or alarmed by the threatenings of the law, the Christian has started toward the New Jerusalem. For a time he struggles manfully with the difficulties of the way. When he has been tempted to give up, the thought that to do so was certain death has nerved him with new vigour, and the sweet promises have inspired him with fresh courage. At last, however, a spirit of lukewarmness commences to creep over him, and to seal up his spiritual senses. He runs less eagerly the Christian way. Conscience is gradually lulled to sleep. The promises fail to allure, the threatenings to arouse. If you hint that he is not as earnest as he ought to be, he is offended. "He feels and knows that all is well."

II. *Consequences of lukewarmness.* "I will spue thee out of my mouth." This implies the loss of spiritual power. All the ordinary machinery of the Church may be kept in operation, but without results. The world encroaches on the Church, instead of the Church gaining accessions from the world. If special means are used, they too fail of the result desired, and that used to follow; and all this because of the withdrawal of the Spirit's influence. You might as well expect to see the engine rush along the track without steam, or the cold iron flashing a message with-

out electricity, or the cannon sending the ball without powder, as to see the Church saving the soul without the Spirit. Of old, when Israel went forth to war without God, she was conquered. So now; our failures are to be attributed largely to the fact that God is not with us. The attempt to account for the success of the Church by the fact that sinners are Gospel hardened is, frequently at least, a mistake. People of the world fail to see that earnestness in us which they have a right to expect. Are there not some who make no profession, who, by their regularity at the means of grace put to shame some who profess? Lukewarm Christians are the greatest inconsistencies in the world, and men of the world are quick to notice any inconsistency, and they stumble over the lukewarm professor. The greatest obstacle to the progress of the Church is not the infidelity of Christian lands or the superstition of heathen lands, but the lukewarmness of the Church. See the small band of followers Christ sent out. Yet how rapidly they spread! So in the days of Wesley. Is not this to be accounted for in a great measure by the fact that so large a percentage were earnest Christians? To the individual this implies the withdrawal of the witness of the Spirit—the rejection of the individual as a child of God. In the destruction that has

come to the Church at Laodicea, we see an explanation and fulfilment of the prophecy. It would seem as if the finger of God had written death and desolation over the whole scene. Where once was heard the hum of busy commerce, and the tread of feet, that beat the murmuring walks like autumn rain, now the wolf and fox prowl amid the loneliness and desolation. A faint picture of what is included to the soul in the words, "I will spue thee out of my mouth." O, to have the soul that was designed for an abode of the Holy Spirit, and to be beautified by the graces of the Spirit, become the abode of evil spirits and a dwelling-place of foul passions! It implies banishment from heaven with its glories, sinking to hell with its sorrows. But the rejection has not yet taken place with reference to you.

III. *The cure of lukewarmness.* "Buy of me gold." Seek for religion that will bear the most trying test, even of fire. Do not mistake the dross for gold—the form for the substance. Be satisfied with nothing less than the love of God—living faith in Jesus—a clear evidence of acceptance—a joyful hope of heaven. "White raiment"—that is, holiness. Our robes are to be made white in the blood of the Lamb. Seek earnestly for a fresh application of the blood that cleanseth. No matter how stained

our garments may be, they may be made white. "Anoint thine eyes with eye salve." One of the worst symptoms is ignorance of our danger; one of the things most necessary for a cure is to have our eyes open to realize the position. We must pray for the light of the Spirit—we must be willing to be aroused. The Spirit's power will enable the lukewarm to realize their danger and the importance of spiritual things. Coming as at first, through penitence and faith, they shall be quickened into new life. Jesus will come in and sup with them. The enjoyment of religion will again be their portion. Religion is calculated to be a source of joy such as nothing else is. The language of lukewarm experience is always mournful—a dirge rather than a song of praise. But as their love is rekindled, God will enable them to sing songs of joy, even amid affliction and trial. Ever remember, the disease has its seat within. The remedy must work within. The wise physician tries to reach the root of the disease. All mere checking of symptoms is temporary and deceptive. So, spiritually, all mere outward reformation is temporary and deceptive. The Great Physician, and He alone, can reach the seat of the disease, and cleanse the foul heart. The Holy Spirit alone can rekindle the fire in the

heart that will send warmth and glow to all the religious life.

When we have our own hearts warmed, an influence will go out from us; zeal will take the place of apathy, and "God, even our own God, shall bless us. Brethren, when we think of the value of souls—of our own souls as well as the souls of others—of the love of Christ—of the shortness of time, are we not all too lukewarm? Let us be zealous and repent. Let us open our hearts. On the one hand is rejection with loathing, "I will spue thee out of my mouth." On the other, the friendship and love of Jesus, "I will come in," and exaltation to him that overcometh. In this world the difference may not appear great; in the next, it will be measured by the distance from the throne to the pit—from fellowship with Jesus to fellowship with the lost. Be zealous, therefore, and repent. Examine yourselves—prove your own selves. Buy the gold, the raiment, the eye salve; and see your home—be clothed with its garments of righteousness, and be rich in its faith, its hope, its charity. This do and live.

Dives at Home.

“There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day.
—*Luke xvi. 19-31.*”

MOST men have felt a desire to have some more definite information about the future world. Many of our friends have entered it. We will soon follow. Yet it is a land from which no traveller returns. For the most part, viewing it, or rather looking toward it from the standpoint of this life, it is “a land of deepest shade.” Here the Saviour for a moment draws aside the veil, and permits us to look in on its awful mysteries. The subject is too solemn to be approached with idle curiosity. As the world unseen will soon hold us all, it should be to us a subject of intensest interest. If circumstances compelled us to go to some distant part of the world to spend the remainder of our days, how anxious we would be to learn something about that country, especially if the information we gained was likely to help us pre-

pare for enjoyment, and help us avoid suffering in that country. Here the two regions of the world of spirits are unveiled—in one of which we will spend eternity. The Saviour, we may rest assured, did not make this revelation to gratify speculation. There are instructions given how we may escape the world of misery, and how we may secure the world of bliss. May I ask you to follow me in the careful study of this deeply interesting parable.

“*A certain rich man.*” We do not understand that there was any sin in his being rich. Abraham, whom in the latter part of the parable we find in heaven, was rich in cattle and in herds. Job was rich, yet he was a good man. If this man’s riches were obtained honestly, it was nothing to his discredit; if obtained by his careful industry, it may have been to his credit. Riches dishonestly gotten are witnesses against a man. “Behold,” says James, “the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth; and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.” There are doubtless many to whom it is a sin to be rich, for the cry of those whom they have defrauded rises to heaven against them. Every day a man holds that which belongs rightfully to another, he is guilty as the day he took it, if

it is in his power to restore. The mere fact of a man's being rich does not prove anything against his moral character; yet the Saviour seems to have designed this as a special warning to rich men. Even when honestly gotten, and, as the world goes, honestly spent, riches are a source of temptation to man—a temptation through which many have fallen. Our Saviour knew human weakness infinitely better than we, and He asks, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter the kingdom of heaven?" Again, we are told they that will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

"*Clothed in purple and fine linen.*" Neither do we understand that this was his sin—pride of dress. Purple was a colour worn by princes and persons in high position. Possibly his rank required it. Christ, you remember, when mocked as king, was clothed in purple. A beggar's rags as well as a prince's robes may cover a proud heart; yet needless display is doubtless a sin. It is possible for us to think too much of adorning these poor bodies. Multitudes doubtless do. I am not sure but one of the commonest sins of the day is this fondness for display—leading to extravagance, and thence in many cases to debt and bankruptcy. There is a

tendency among all classes to live beyond their means. In needless luxuries and needless display men squander the gifts of Providence, till many a time conveniences and even necessities are wanting; then frequently they turn and commence to complain of unfruitful seasons and hard times. Much depends on a man's rank and financial position, but not everything. A man, because he is wealthy, has no right to squander his wealth in what neither adds to his comfort nor his appearance, but simply is a display of wealth. Are there not those who purchase costly attire, not because it is really more serviceable or more beautiful, frequently, but because its costliness is an indication of wealth? It is, wherever they go, an advertisement of wealth.

"Fared sumptuously every day." Some people have a banquet occasionally—on some feast day or birthday—but this man had a feast every day. The best that the times and the land afforded were found constantly on his table. Still, I am not sure that this points out his sin. I am not sure that he was either a glutton or a drunkard. Yet, here again is one of the weak points in human nature, and here, I think, is another of the sins of the age. To secure healthful, nutritious food, is a duty; but is there not a tendency unduly to exalt creature com-

forts? In the newspapers, in the last week, I noticed the bill of fare of our new Governor and lady, on a certain occasion, detailed with great minuteness. I reflect neither on the party nor on those who provided for them; but that such a matter should claim so much space in the public prints indicates that our generation are inclined to overvalue them. To be at great expense to please the palate, while no nutriment is added to the system—or, as with many, to be at great expense to please the palate with what poisons the system—is a sin. The glutton and the drunkard sink the spiritual and exalt the animal—that which God intended to be lower in us, they make higher. Those appetites God intended as servants, they have made masters. To think of men binding reason and conscience, and giving the reins to appetite! What an insult to our Maker, who has made us in His own image! Can we wonder that some of the most terrible punishments come to such? Look at the victim of *delirium tremens*—perhaps the best illustration of the misery of the lost our world affords. In him you see the scathing, withering rebuke of the Almighty of this sin of exalting the animal. God has made us a combination of the physical and the spiritual. He intends the spiritual should be first. To put the physical first is to invert His order. To

invert God's order is to sink, instead of rising—is to degrade, instead of exalting—is to travel toward wreck and ruin, instead of toward glory, honour, immortality, and eternal life. I am not sure that any of these are intended to point out this man's sin. If we would feel the force of the Saviour's teaching, we must see clearly the character He delineates. If you lay the stress on any of these points, I think you miss what was, I believe, intended as the principal feature. If he was dishonest, proud, or gluttonous, these were merely sprouts that grew from a root buried deeply in his character. Even already we have enough to lead us to suspect his besetment; but we leave it for the present, as it comes out more clearly in a later part of the parable.

“And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores.” Neither was there any virtue necessarily in this man's poverty, or affliction, or humble fare. Many, I fear, are poor, and perhaps afflicted as Lazarus, who are travelling a road that will lead from affliction and suffering here to suffering greater still hereafter. Poverty, which comes from slothfulness or waste, is a sin, or the result of sin. We must not think that poverty and affliction are in themselves any necessary preparation for heaven. “Blessed,” said Christ, “are the poor

in spirit." But, alas! many are poor in purse who are not poor in spirit. It is difficult to say whether the temptations of extreme poverty or extreme riches are greater. While the rich are tempted to pride, self-indulgence, self-sufficiency, the poor are tempted to murmur, to repine, to be envious. The moral character a man develops amid the temptations of poverty, or those of riches, are what will settle his doom. Beneath the beggar's rags, and beneath the purple and fine linen, there was a heart that would settle the doom. If the grace of God dwelt there—if the blood of Christ had been applied there, the beggar's rags would not disqualify for heaven; and if not, a prince's purple would be no recommendation.

"*And desiring to be fed.*" Ah! there you say, perhaps, is the rich man's sin. Some suppose that the expression, "desiring to be fed," intimates that he was not fed. I am not sure of that. It rather seems to be the fact that he is spoken of as being regularly laid there, which would not have been the case if he had obtained nothing. Then, afterward we hear the rich man desiring Lazarus to be sent, intimating, perhaps, that he thought Lazarus under obligation. The expression "crumbs" may mislead. It means what fell from the rich man's table—the leavings, the fragments. Doubtless Lazarus

did not receive all that his necessities required, or all that the rich man could easily have given. Yet, probably, there was no unusual selfishness or want of charity. Quite likely, he thought himself very liberal in allowing the beggar to share with his dogs—especially in allowing one loathsome with sores to lie at his gate. Probably the rich man did offend here, but I do think this is the principal point to be noted in his character. Those who are prosperous are too apt to forget those unfortunate or less successful. We are apt to attribute our superior success to our own industry, superior wisdom in managing our affairs, etc.—and I would not say a word to encourage the thought that success comes in any other way—but who gave us the superior wisdom or energy? Who blessed us with health, or screened us from disasters that have kept many a man as wise and as energetic as ourselves from success? A want of sympathy for and of kindness toward others is one of the ways in which the rich man's besetment nearly always shows itself. If we are troubled in this way, we have need to fear we, too, are troubled in the same way.

“Moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores.” Here, then, are the two pictures drawn in strong contrast. A beggar clad in rags—filthy with sores—compelled to beg even for the necessaries

of life—an object probably of disgust almost to his more fortunate fellow-creatures. As they pass in and out of the rich man's gate, some, perhaps, cast scornful looks, and wonder that the rich man should allow such an object to disfigure his grounds; some, of a more sympathising turn, drop a few pence in his feeble, trembling hand, or speak a kind word. The dogs, apparently his kindest friends, gather round and lick his sores. Thus the days, as it would appear to us, drag by. On the other hand is one whose coffers are full—clad in softest, gayest attire—feeding on costliest, daintiest fare. Friends attentive and numerous doubtless he has, for the rich have many friends. Servants wait to do his bidding. All the rough places in life seem smoothed for him; all the harsh *é*xperiences are softened. There are rough rubs and hard hits for others in the business of life; but the rich man seems to have the right of way everywhere. Others step aside to let him pass. Thus, attending to his estate, gathering his revenues, or administering the duties of his office if a ruler, his days glide pleasantly along. As you gaze at these two pictures, which do you prefer? Wealth, ease, respectability; or poverty, suffering, neglect? Looking merely at the outside, we wonder not that one should prefer the brighter picture. To be able

to choose wisely, we must look beneath the surface. Already there have been circumstances in the rich man's case that awaken suspicion. The outward beauty and attractiveness are like the rainbow hung on a black cloud—beautiful without, dark and stormy within.

“And it came to pass, that the beggar died.” We don't read that he was buried, but common decency would require that. But there would be very little mourning. It would be a very simple affair. They

“Rattle his bones over the stones ;
He is only a beggar who nobody owns.”

Thus the earthly scene closes. But look now as our Saviour draws aside the curtain—*“Was carried.”* It is all dark on this side—it's all bright on the other side. He is honoured with the best society now. He is wealthy now—happy now. How great the change ! We don't read that the angels came to carry him. It is simply said, *“was carried.”* It seems as if they have been by him all the while. Perhaps he has not been so neglected as he seemed ; perhaps he has, like the Master on one occasion, had food to eat the world knew not of. Angels' hands, it may be, have broken the bread of life to his soul. His bodily wounds were, perhaps, unbound. Angels' hands, it may be, bound up

spiritual sores really more painful and more dangerous than bodily. His spiritual diseases have all been healed. Companionless he appears, but there has been a Friend by his side. Our bodily diseases are sometimes hard to bear, but it does not matter much if our souls are healthy. The cravings of hunger are hard to bear, but it does not matter much if our souls are fed. It is hard to be friendless in this world, but it does not matter much if we have the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

"And the rich man died also"—riches can't bribe Death—*"and was buried."* There would be a pompous funeral—there would be great lamentation. Hired mourners at Eastern funerals were common, but doubtless there would be real ones. We have noticed no gross crime is laid to his charge. He doubtless was respected, and now many kind things would be said of him. His generous hospitality, his elegant furnishings, perchance his courtly manners—all would be discussed and applauded. Now, let us again, in solemn reverence, draw nigh as our Saviour draws aside the curtain. Listen! *"In hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments."* How these awful words break amid the anxious strifes, the gay festivities of this world. Oh! that they might awaken thoughtfulness. Is there not something more important about life

than we have been in the habit of thinking? Amid the hurry of business, or the whirl of pleasure, men forget that "it is not all of life to live, nor all of death to die." The voice of the Saviour to-night sounds solemnly in our ears; but remember, they are the Saviour's words, the words of One who knows just what life means—what death means—what eternity means for us. It was all bright before—it is all dark now. Yet, friends, we have reason to believe his position was not so enviable as it appeared. The more I study God's word, and the more I study human experience, the more I am convinced that the heaven or the hell of the future are the natural outgrowths of our experience in this world. As we proceed in the further study of the case, I think we will see how his course in this world naturally led to his fate in the next. We notice the rich man is in torment. There is in the human mind natural shrinking from the thought of future torment. There is a disposition to be sceptical about it. I simply say these are the words of the tender, compassionate Saviour—the same Saviour who uttered the promises and the invitations. He would not have uttered the words if it was not necessary for us to hear them. The pain is represented as intense. Whether there is literal fire or not, it is not important

for us to discuss. This much the experience of men in this world makes clear—one of the acutest pains man can suffer is from a guilty conscience. Listen to the words of a learned man, himself a sceptic, with reference to future, everlasting punishment: "From my own experience, I know the remorse which comes from conscious violation of my own integrity—from treason to myself and my God. It transcends all bodily pain, all grief at disappointed schemes, all anguish which comes from sickness—aye, from the death of dear ones prematurely taken away." These are the words of one, I say, who was himself sceptical. When we have the clear teaching of Christ, and that teaching is interpreted and enforced by an experience of our own hearts, we should not hesitate—it is a truth.

"*Father Abraham.*" He was a Jew then. He had spiritual privileges. Whatever his sin may have been, it was aggravated by the fact that he had light. It is possible for children of godly parentage, of many privileges, to perish. Abraham does not deny the relationship—"Son, remember!" There we have an eternal scourge of the guilty pointed out—Memory—of folly, sin, warnings neglected, invitations rejected. Every time a man sins, he unwittingly ties another lash to memory's

scourge. "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things." Here, it seems to me, is the clearest light that shines on this character. He was a man who just lived for this world. His riches, his good living, his goodly apparel, his friendships, his honours—these were his good things. How to get the greatest enjoyment out of this world was the great question. His plans, his ambitions, his thoughts were all bounded by the narrow horizon of this world. His affections were all entwined around things of this world. He had grown fast to the earth. He is not a representative of what are usually regarded as flagrant transgressors. He was a very common type of a man—a representative of a large class. There is this peculiarity in the teaching of Christ, its application was not local and temporary. It applies to multitudes the world over, and in all the ages. My friends, are there not any of us who belong to this class? Worldliness is a sin, not according to their opinions disgraceful, but according to the teachings of Christ just as ruinous. To be successful in business, to move in good society, to have the best in food and clothing, to have as much of the pleasures of this world as is possible—are these your good things—life's great objects to you? Then do you belong

to this class. To you the subject has solemn warning. You are making the mistake of leaving the most important part of your existence unthought of, unprovided for. The rich man maketh good provision for his bodily wants, and apparently for this life. But the soul has a hunger also; for that he had no food. The soul needed clothing. When the body, fed and cared for so carefully, died, what then? When he passed away from the pleasures and the treasures of earth, what then? Why, he found himself a pauper—his starving soul crying out for food—his naked, unprotected soul cowering away from punishment—now, alas! unavoidable. He was in torment—he could not be otherwise. The suffering of the other world was the natural fruit of the neglect of this world. If you neglect the soul, it must at last suffer. To live just for self, and for the present, is a fatal mistake.

My friends, the warning comes from one who is wise and good. To save us from this fate Christ came to our world. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." We have not only Moses and the prophets, but Christ and the apostles. With Him to warn and instruct, if we do not heed, neither would we if one should rise from the dead. I think I hear

some one ask, "Will we have to think and plan about things of the world, if we succeed?" Are we to go out of the business world, as hermits did in olden times, and spend our time in mortifying the flesh, in praying and meditating? No; the hermits found they could not so easily shake off the world. The trouble is not in the world, or its business, but in ourselves. A man may be earnest and successful in business, and yet not live alone for this world. You cannot drive out the love of the world unless you supplant it by something else. The human heart cannot be a vacuum. The only way of driving out wrong affections is by having them supplanted by right affections. Let love to God become the ruling power—then worldly business, worldly friendships, worldly enjoyments of a holy kind will not cease to exist; but they will all be regulated by that which is designed as the great regulator of our affections and lives—love to God. Multitudes are guilty of this folly; conscious that eternal duration awaits them—knowing that at infinite cost it has been made possible for them to get ready, they remain unprepared. Oh! may God arouse you!

XIII.

Sowing and Reaping.

“Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”
—*Gal.* vi. 7.

WE may perhaps say we have two revelations of the character and will of God. In the first place, we have a dim and somewhat indistinct and consequently imperfect revelation in the works of God, and in the course of His providence. The stars that shine in the firmament, the trees that grow in the forest, the animals that roam over the earth, the flowers that deck the plain—all these show the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of God, in creating, in arranging, in sustaining. St. Paul refers to this revelation in the works of God. In his Epistle to the Romans he says (1st chap., 20th verse), “The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.” But in the Bible we have a fuller, clearer, and more blessed revelation.

“ Part of thy name divinely stands,
On all thy creatures writ ;
They show the labour of thy hands,
Or impress of thy feet.

“ But when we view thy strange design
To save rebellious worms ;
Where vengeance and compassion join
In their divinest forms :

“ Here the whole Deity is known,
Nor dares a creature guess
Which of the glories brightest shone,
The justice, or the grace.”

It is a strong proof that the Bible is the book of God, that it does not contradict that revelation in his works. So far from contradicting, they support each other. Truths that are dimly, indistinctly taught in nature, are fully revealed in the Bible. Many things that appear mysterious or even contradictory in nature, are reconciled in the Bible. On the other hand, the truths of the Bible are many times confirmed, or are beautifully illustrated by the works of God. This is the case with the truth St. Paul wishes to teach in our text. The truth he seems to be teaching is, that the government of God is one of fixed and settled principles. We are not to expect that our reward or punishment is to be a matter of chance—that the wicked will in some cases go

unpunished, and the righteous unrewarded. To illustrate this truth with regard to God's spiritual government, he refers to a law of his natural government—that each particular sort of grain will, when sown, produce its kind. “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

Now, the regularity and uniformity of the laws of the natural world—the regular return, for instance, of cold and heat, summer and winter, spring-time and harvest, day and night—is a matter in which men universally have the strongest faith. See that man casting his seed into the soil. Go and ask him why he does it; and he will tell you it is because he believes that, under the influence of the summer sun and of moisture, each handful of grain he scatters will produce many handfuls—each bushel many bushels. But you ask how do you know there is going to be any summer? He will tell you it has always been so. The laws of nature in this respect have never been known to fail. Ask him then how he knows that the seed will produce its kind; may it not produce some noxious weed instead of the useful grain he scatters? He would say such was never known to be the case since the world began. Questions of this kind would be regarded as foolish. And why? Just because the laws of nature in this respect have

never been known to fail. Men have the strongest faith in this, but they do not appear to have as strong faith in the regulation of the laws of the spiritual kingdom. You may see many men sowing to the flesh—that is, living a life of sin—and yet expecting to reap of the Spirit life everlasting. Now, the Apostle calls in this strong witness, if I may so speak, from the natural world, to prove that such conduct is unreasonable. In the spiritual as in the natural world, “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” The light of nature should be sufficient to teach men the folly of expecting an eternity of happiness after a life of sin. The laws of the spiritual kingdom are just as fixed and regular as the laws of the natural kingdom. It is true God is a God of mercy, and means have been provided by which one who has sinned may be saved. But we must remember how this mercy is extended to us. God shows His mercy not in breaking His own laws, but in strict conformity to them. God’s mercy will not lead Him to break His own laws in order to save any man; and a man might just as well think that after having sown tares in his field, the Almighty would in His mercy give wheat or some useful grain, as to suppose that, after living and dying in sin, God would from His mercy save him. If

a man has sown one kind of grain in his field, and he afterward wishes for another kind of harvest, the only way for him to obtain that harvest from that field is to plough up, destroy that which he has sown, and put in that which he wishes to reap. Now, just so spiritually. If a man wishes to reap the fruit of holiness after he has been sowing the seed of sin, those plants of iniquity must be destroyed and the good seed must be cast into his heart; in other words, he must be converted. And for this provision has been made, and in this way God may be merciful.

But not only in the natural world do we see illustrations of this—we see them also in our own characters and conditions in this world. True, men do not always reap the fruit of their own doings in this world, but they frequently do; and in this again we have a faint foreshadowing at least of the more perfect working of this law in another world. Our various conditions of riches or poverty, sickness or health, respectability or disgrace, frequently arise from ourselves. Go to that man who is wealthy and inquire how he got his wealth, and you will usually find it was by industry, economy, frugality. Go to the man who is suffering from poverty and want, and you will generally find it is from either sloth, or waste, or carelessness,

or all combined. Both of these are reaping what they themselves have sown. The man who enjoys the respect of the community will generally be found to have acquired it by his uprightness, by his honesty, by conducting himself in such a way as to be worthy of respect; so, on the other hand, those who are in disgrace usually have brought it on themselves by their misconduct. These again are reaping what they have sown. And the same may be said of those who are suffering from sickness or enjoying health.

But we see illustrations of this also in the habits and characters of men even in this world. You know that it is a law of our nature that any act frequently repeated becomes gradually easy—natural. In this way habits are formed, and our habits have much to do in forming our characters, and our characters fix our destiny; so that in this we see how we shall reap what we sow. Our acts lead to the formation of our characters. Our characters, then, to a great extent, are the fruit of our own sowing; and as our doom flows from our character, our doom is the reaping of our own sowing. It is said that Nero, the Roman emperor, when a boy, took pleasure in killing flies. The cruel character thus fostered produced one of the most execrable of tyrants. We might refer to many examples to show that our habits are the fruit of our

own sowing. Look at the miser, who clutches his gold even in death. That unnatural love for money began perhaps years ago, when he hoarded his pennies as a boy. He encouraged and fostered it, until at last he is governed by it: all he thinks of is money. Dearer to him than the interests of humanity is his gold. He drives the beggar from his door. Dearer is it to him than the cause of religion. He gives nothing, or but little, even for the holiest cause. Dearer in some instances has this passion become than wife or children, or even than life itself, and he has starved or frozen to death hugging his gold. He is reaping what he sowed. Look at the man who has the habit of using that weed called tobacco. He began at first with a distaste for it; but through perseverance in acquiring such a noble habit he succeeds—habit conquers. Look at the drunkard. He began by taking one glass. That was the seed from which all the terrible harvest he reaps sprang. He sowed appetite, he reaps appetite, until at last the appetite becomes his master, and a cruel master it is. Though he sees friends going, health going, respectability going, prosperity going, his soul going, on, on, on he is driven by this cruel master he himself has made. Hear that man mingling oaths with almost every sentence he utters. How did he acquire

such a fearful habit? He, too, is only another exemplification of the law, "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Trace his history back, and you will probably come to a time when he never swore. Perhaps he was brought up in a Christian family. Perhaps in his boyhood he attended a Sunday-school. But he heard his companions swear, and for the sake of being like his fellows, or of appearing what he considers manly, he utters his first oath. He is almost startled—frightened at the sound of his own voice. His first attempt is awkward. He is not yet skilled in the language of profanity. His conscience, too, reproves him. His first oath was the seed. Now he is proficient in this language of the pit. He interlards oaths with all his conversation. If he wishes to impart more than usual force to anything he is saying, he uses an oath. If he wishes to spice up an indecent story, he uses an oath. If he wishes to give point to a joke, he uses the name of the holy God. Do angry passions swell in his breast against his fellow-men or against some poor dumb brute, he gives relief to his rage in profaning the name of that God who might in a moment call him to an account. He is already reaping what he has sown. But there is a more fearful reaping yet to come. We sometimes meet with melancholy

examples of this in the liar. Some persons seem so to have addicted themselves to lying that they scarcely know when they are telling the truth, and it would almost seem as if to stop lying they must also stop speaking. Then there are habits of thought. By encouraging any particular train of thought it becomes habitual. But there are good habits as well as bad—habits of temperance, honesty, and virtue, as well as habits of intemperance, dishonesty, and vice. This law of habit is a benefit or an injury according as we use or abuse it. Our good habits tend to lead toward heaven, our bad habits tend to lead toward hell. There is not one of us who is not more or less under the influence of habits; in other words, there is not one of us who, even in this world, is not to some extent reaping what he has sown. Every time we indulge in them we strengthen them. If they are good, we are forming a golden chain which will tend to lift us toward heaven. If they are bad, we are adding link to link to an iron chain which is to bind us hand and foot. Thus we go on through life, forming habits that carry us further and further from God, or habits that bring us nearer and nearer to Him. And after death have we any reason to suppose this law will cease? I think not. We are certain, however, that death will not change our character.

We are all through life forming a character, and we will carry it with us into the other world. But there are two changes that will probably be made by death: 1st. The law will operate more regularly and more swiftly. In this world are many things that prevent the perfect working of this law. The wicked do not descend as rapidly as they would, because of many restraints that are mercifully thrown around them. The righteous do not improve as rapidly as they would, because they are subject to the temptations and allurements of a sinful world and the devil, and are yet in a clay tenement, which sometimes clog them in their progress.

2nd. We notice, that in the other world there will be no change of character. Here, a man who is to-day sowing the seed of sin, may to-morrow be sowing the seed of holiness. But there the law is, "He that is holy, let him be holy still; he that is filthy, let him be filthy still." Now, supposing this law to go on operating, as we believe it will, for ever, what a future it opens before us! Suppose one abandoned to those evil propensities which he has formed through life, every hindrance withdrawn, so that these evil passions may have full scope—how solemn the thought! Even in this life evil habits bring misery. Those abandoned

to those passions he has chosen and fostered— forever sinning and becoming more sinful— forever hating and becoming more hateful— evil ever growing, and as it grows heaping up new misery. Suppose a company of such. Suppose a man freed from all sin, possessing only those dispositions and desires the word of God enjoins. What would there be to mar the happiness—the love to God and man, ever increasing—the joy, ever abounding more and more—the river of peace that flows through the happy soul, ever widening and deepening? Suppose a company of such. Forever they are getting new views of God's power, and wisdom, and love, and this would forever call forth new delight, and call forth new songs of sweeter and louder praise to Him that hath loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood; their harps of gold would ever send forth new harmonies, their happiness would be forever augmenting, growing nearer and nearer to God—forever sowing, forever reaping. Thus there is endless progression, either upward or downward.

Now, we have heard it asserted that the happiness of the saved is all to arise just in this way. Being possessed of all those virtues from which happiness springs, and free from all that could disturb, they must be happy. On

the other hand, the wicked, being given entirely up to evil, will from that very evil suffer all their punishment. In other words, virtue is to be its own reward, and vice its own punishment. Now, it is doubtless true that virtue brings happiness, and vice misery; yet we believe that this is not to be all the punishment on the one hand, nor all the reward on the other. God, we believe, will render to every man a reward or punishment which shall, in the eyes of infinite justice, be proportioned to the merit or demerit of his acts. And this, it seems to me, appears the more necessary when we consider that, in addition to the influence we are having on our own character, we are also influencing others; while we are sowing seed in our own hearts, we are sowing seed in the hearts of others. Each one of us is exerting an influence that will tell for good or evil on those around us. Each one of us is, so to speak, a centre of influence from which radiate forces that will elevate or lower our fellows. That influence is felt most by those with whom we are most in contact—our relatives, those of our own household, our neighbours, the community in which we live. The influence of some great men is easily traced. What a mighty influence Wesley exerted! The religious condition of England—may I not say of the world?—was raised by

him. He was a centre from which have radiated beams of light on all the world. On the other hand, how marked the influence for evil of such men as Voltaire, Hume, Paine. They scattered a moral contagion which has not yet ceased to curse mankind. And each of us, no matter how feeble, is exerting some influence—influence, too, that extends much further than we would at first imagine. You have perhaps on a calm day stood over a body of water and dropped a little pebble into its placid bosom. A succession of wavelets in circles has been started. One has followed another, continually widening, and as they widened becoming more and more indistinct, till perhaps they have passed entirely from view. Yet, philosophers tell us that these little circles still go on until the last rippling wavelet breaks on the shore. It is thus with our influence. Dropped into the sea of life, it goes on spreading till the last wave of influence breaks on the shore of eternity. We are starting influences that will live while time continues. The word flies from our lips; if it be a word of sin, it carries a curse. It may be an oath which is thus first taught to a youth who listens. He learns to swear. In turn he teaches others, and they others. On the other hand, if it was a holy word it may awaken serious impressions, give rise to holy desires, and be the

means of leading a soul to Christ. He in his turn may lead others. That one word may be a blessing while time continues. The influences we are thus exerting for weal or woe cannot well be recalled. You stand on the side of a mountain. Before you the ground slopes away in a steep descent. At your feet lies a loose fragment of rock. With your foot you set it in motion. At first it moves slowly; you scarcely know whether it will descend the hill or not; you might easily arrest it; but now it is rushing, bounding, crushing down the hillside, carrying, it may be, death and destruction to the dwellers in the plain below. 'Tis thus with our influence. We start some scheme. At first we do not know whether it will succeed. But soon it begins to take. Now it is rushing along. If it is an unholy one, it will continue carrying misery down the steeps of time to the latest generation. Who started the first gambling saloon? Or, as an example of the opposite kind, think of Wesley starting the Praying Club. With difficulty the project was carried out, amid jeer and taunt. From that came the Methodist Church, and now the influence is moving more rapidly than ever, bearing away all opposition. The little rill that on the mountain top might be turned by a mere trifle, grows and grows till mighty fleets float on its bosom.

It may be thus with your influence. We sometimes hear it said, It is a solemn thing to die. May we not ask, Is it not a solemn thing to live?

To the sinner these words are a solemn warning. You must not think to escape the judgments of God. How many are hardening their hearts while professing to be trusting in God's mercy? "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." (Ecc. viii. 11.) But "be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." You have the strongest confidence in the laws of nature. Why not have the same in the laws of the kingdom of heaven? Oh! as you see the seed springing up and growing—as you see the golden ears wave in the summer's sun—as you see the garner harvested, let it be reminding you of this law of the kingdom—"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

To the Christian this is a word of encouragement. You have scattered seed many a time, and it would seem as if it were lost. You have prayed for some blessing; yet it does not come. But God is not slack concerning his promises. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." How often has the weary toiler to say with the prophet, "Who hath believed our re-

port?" Let this strengthen your faith, "Whatsoever." He who takes notice of the little grain that is cast into the soil and causes it to grow, will not forget the seed you sow; therefore be not weary in well-doing.

"Sow in the morn thy seed,
At eve hold not thy hand ;
To doubt and fear give thou no heed,
Broadcast it o'er the land.

"Sow near all waters, sow ;
The highway furrows stock ;
Scatter where thorns and briers grow,
Broadcast it on the rock.

"Thou canst not toil in vain ;
Cold, heat, and wet and dry,
Shall nurture and mature the grain,
For garners in the sky.

"And when the glorious end,
The day of God shall come ;
The angel reapers shall descend,
And heaven sing harvest home."

"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

XIV.

Wheat Harvest Day.

“Is it not wheat harvest to-day?”—1 *Sam.* xii. 17.

GOD speaks to us through nature. Not so clearly as through His Word, it is true. He would be a foolish man who would lay the volume of inspiration aside to learn from nature—as foolish as he who, needing clear light for his work, should prefer starlight to sunlight. Yet in the ever-shifting panorama of nature there are sights and experiences that suggest and impress lessons of the Word. In these days men are discovering that what was learned through the ear can be more deeply impressed by being learned through the eye. Hence, in our Sabbath and day-schools, what is taught by word through the ear is as much as possible taught over again through the eye in pictures on the board, or in the paper, or in objects presented to the eye. So, it seems to me, God deals with us. Nature is the board where God presents to the eyes of man what has already

been taught through the ear. Each season presents us with a picture. Autumn, with its yellow leaves, its decaying verdure, its sighing winds, its sobbing storms, followed by cold winter with its winding-sheet of snow, tells us of old age, of decay, and death. Spring, with its bursting buds, its springing flowers, its warbling songsters, tells us of a resurrection from the tomb—when

“ Saints now rising from the tomb,
With lustre brighter far shall shine,
Revive with ever-during bloom,
Safe from diseases and decline.”

Summer, with its golden grain and its luscious fruit, tells us of the reward, the abundance of our heavenly home. Each season has a voice. Autumn winds seem to say, “ All flesh is grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof fadeth away, but the word of the Lord endureth forever.” And winter storms seem sounding forth a dirge at the grave of buried nature, and as we listen we hear them say, “ Thou turnest men to destruction, and sayest, Return, ye children of men.” Spring, with glad voice, seems to be calling “ Mountains and all hills, fruitful trees and all cedars, beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying fowl, kings

of the earth and all people, princes and all judges of the earth, both young men and maidens, old men and children, let them praise the name of the Lord." And summer catches up the strain and sings, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." We to-day would strive to learn the lessons taught by the season.

Harvest should remind us of God's goodness.

Every day, tables spread with plenty remind us of it. Every draught from the clear stream tells of it. But as summer pours her wealth of treasure into our garner, and fills our barns with the finest of the wheat, then a voice seems to speak with unusual emphasis, "God is good unto all, and His tender mercies are over all His works. He crowneth the year with His goodness, His paths drop fatness." It reminds us of God's constant oversight. There is a tendency in these days to think of God as far off—as having set the machinery of nature in motion, and then left our world to the government of natural law; but when we think what a nice adjustment of nature's forces is necessary to a fruitful harvest, it seems to me we see evidence that God overrules nature's forces and adjusts them so as to supply the wants of His favoured creature, man. If the winter's frosts had been a little more severe, or had continued a little later, where would the

harvest be? If the spring rains had not come, if the summer showers had not been so well timed, would there have been such an abundant harvest? Too much heat would have withered the young plants. Too much wet would have been equally injurious. If there had been a very great extreme in either way, our barns had been empty, and ere another summer's sun had goldened the harvest, the children in many a home would have cried in vain for food. Has it been the work of blind chance that things have been so arranged? Surely the wonderful balancing of nature's forces is evidence that an intelligent Being superintends our world, and the abundant blessings that flow from this adjustment of nature's forces are evidence of His goodness. Let sceptics quibble as they will, we, as Christians, see the hand of our God reached down to us filled with bread for His children for another year.

Again, in this harvest we see evidence of God's faithfulness. The promise is, "While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

Again, the harvest reminds us of our dependence. During last summer you broke up your fallows—with harrow and plough you carefully prepared it. It cost you a great deal of bodily

toil—a great deal of anxious thought to get it ready. At length you cast in the seed. You had the field just right, as you thought. Yet when you had done your utmost, how dependent you were! There was in the early autumn a time of drought. Long some of the seed had been sown before a green blade appeared. How anxiously the farmer looked for the rain! God was teaching you your dependence on Him. After a time the rain came, but with winter months you looked for snowy sheets to cover the grain. You said, "The harvest will be small unless we get snow." Again God was repeating the lesson of your dependence on Him. The spring months came, and you were anxious for warm showers to revive the wheat after its long struggle with the frosts. And through the early weeks of summer, how anxious lest there should be too much rain, or too much heat, or not enough. It seems to me that men ought thoroughly to have learned that lesson—their utter weakness and dependence. Is your little child, just learning to walk, too confident of its own strength? Let it try to walk alone, and soon the numerous mishaps will teach it to be glad for the hand of father or mother. So when for a time God withdraws His hand, apparently, we learn our need of help.

God's goodness, as manifest in the abundant

harvest, should call forth our gratitude. The seven years of plenty were not more directly the gift of God in the land of Egypt, than is this year of plenty the gift of God to us. Our Government usually sets apart a day of thanksgiving for the province, but our incense of grateful praise to the Lord of the harvest should go up all the year. As the farmer draws the golden sheaves to his barn, as he threshes the grain, he should send up the incense of gratitude—thanksgiving and praise—to the Giver of all good. His goodness calls not only for gratitude, but also for obedient service. When Joseph, under God, fed the people during the seven years of famine, they gave up everything—cattle, farms, and finally themselves—and became Pharaoh's servants. God has fed us, not only for seven years, but during our lives. Surely God has a right to us. Our bodies have been made of food He has given. See that ye glorify Him in them. This harvest reminds you that you are not your own. See that "you glorify Him in your bodies and spirits, which are His." Your property is not your own. You point to your well-filled barns and say, "Look at the fruits of our toil." I say, nay, rather look at the fruits of God's goodness. The Government that protects you in the possession of your property claims tribute of you. They say, "But for our protection,

bands of marauders might have robbed you of your harvest, and we demand tribute from you." Has God not a right to tribute—He whose rain has watered your growing crops—whose sun causes them to spring up, first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear? My friends, God's kingdom will demand your support in its missionary efforts. While you render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, see that you render to God the things that are God's.

Again, God's faithfulness, as seen in the regular returns of the seasons, should teach us trust. He who never breaks His promises in nature, never breaks them in grace. His care for our temporal wants is but an emblem of His care for our spiritual needs. "No good thing will He withhold from them that fear Him." Not one of all the good things He has promised shall fail. Again, the harvest is a rebuke to our pride and our selfishness. When God is so good to us, notwithstanding our unworthiness, surely we should not shut our bowels of compassion from any of the children of men. We see God sending His rain on the evil and the good, on the just and on the unjust.

II. These are some of the lessons that ought to be impressed on us by the natural harvest. There are several spiritual harvests to which we wish to direct your attention. Harvest is

used figuratively, to denote the season of opportunity God gives to us to secure salvation. This is the signification of the passage, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended." Does God give us in the circle of the seasons a time of barrenness—of sterility? He first gives us the summer, with its productive seasons. Is there coming the winter of death? God first sends the harvest of opportunity to provide for it. In this sense, with most of us, is it not harvest to-day? We are, most of us, in the enjoyment of health and vigour. We live in an age of glorious opportunity. There never was a time when information on religious subjects was more generally diffused. Churches where the word of God is expounded are within easy reach of all our homes. Bibles are found in almost every house. Religious influences are abroad in society. The Spirit's striving is felt in our hearts. It is ours to use the opportunities. If we feel an interest in spiritual things, we should foster it till the interest grows to anxiety, and the anxiety compels us to urge our plea till God grants us salvation. God, who is so rich in His goodness in nature, is also rich in grace. He is not more willing to give supplies for our bodies to the farmer than He is to give us sustenance for our souls. It is harvest to-day. Some of you are just in the

midst of it—just at the best time for using the influences. Some of the youngest are, perhaps, just entering the field. Some are, it may be, just about to leave. To all I say, the provision you have for the coming winter of death will depend on yourselves. God causes His Sun of Righteousness to shine and the rain of spiritual influence to descend, but there will be no supply for you unless you labour for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life.

A lesson we have learned from the harvest is, God's goodness does not make our personal efforts unnecessary. God's goodness in nature makes it possible for man to obtain supplies, but God's goodness does not provide the supplies independently of man's efforts. In order to obtain supplies from nature, you must become a co-worker with God—you must work with His rain and His sunshine. So in spiritual matters, you must be a co-worker with Himself. God's goodness will not save you, except as you make use of the opportunities which His goodness places within your reach. It would be considered a strange argument if I should go to the farmer toiling in the harvest-field till the sweat dropped from his sun-browned face to the ground, and say, "God is good; He will supply your wants. You need not toil so hard." He would say, "Yes; God is good. His good-

ness has blessed me with an abundant harvest ; but that does not make effort the less necessary, but rather the more. If God had not been good, had sent no showers or warmth to my fields, then there would be no use for toil." Men seldom are so foolish with reference to natural things as to argue that because God is good they need not exert themselves. If a man should be so foolish, and should fold his arms through harvest, God's goodness would not gather the fruit for him. The stooks of corn would rot in the field, and pinching poverty next winter would probably correct his reasoning. Yet the children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light, or men are wiser about temporal things than about spiritual. There are thousands throughout the land to-day doing little or nothing about spiritual matters, and if I should go and ask "Why don't you bestir yourselves? Why are you not earnestly seeking salvation?" they would say, if they expressed the real thought of the heart, "God is good. He will not be so strict with us poor creatures, and salvation is of grace." I come to you to-day with this lesson from the natural harvest, and ask you to apply it to the spiritual harvest. God's goodness was never intended to take the place of your efforts. God is good—one of the

most glorious truths we have to proclaim. His goodness has provided an inexhaustible supply. It has given you opportunities for securing that supply. He is so good that He willeth not the death of him that dieth. But there are some things you cannot expect God's goodness to do for you. If you neglect the opportunities of this harvest, you cannot reasonably expect that God's goodness will keep you from hunger and want next winter. So if men will neglect the harvest of golden opportunities, they will look in vain for God's goodness to provide for them in the eternal future. Men are making strange use of the goodness of God. They argue that God's goodness will not allow men to perish. Look around and see do not men suffer and even perish when they neglect opportunity.

It is harvest to-day. Be up and doing. Seize every opportunity. Lay up in store for yourselves a good foundation against the time to come. Lay hold on eternal life. Many men will come through this harvest looking like those who have passed through a severe sickness—so worn and weary. The earnestness with which men improve the time of natural harvest is a rebuke to their indifference with reference to the spiritual. May none of us have to take up the lamentation, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved!"

Again, there is another spiritual sense in which the word "harvest" is used in Scripture. It is as of the gathering of souls into the Church on earth. Our Saviour said, "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already unto harvest," meaning that there were many souls ready to receive the truth. John the Baptist first began to break up fallow ground for Gospel seed. Jesus came and continued the work, and cast in the seed of truth. On the day of Pentecost there was a gathering of three thousand souls to the Church on earth, and most of them, we trust, were gathered at length to the Church in heaven. All through those early days there was an abundant yield to the seed of truth, in some thirty, in some sixty, and in some an hundred fold. Since then the sowing has gone on, and many a glorious harvest has there been. Agencies are employed in scattering the seed of truth unknown to the early Church. Tract Societies, Bible Societies, Missionary Societies are sowing it in many a wilderness and many a desert of sin. Slowly the harvest is being gathered—more slowly than it ought. Not because God does not send the rain and the sunshine, but because the Church is not faithful. Oh, what glorious harvests might be gathered if every Christian was as he should be! If it is not, it ought to be harvest to-day.

In nature, our sowing and reaping are separated. "Are there not four months?" He had just sowed the seed, and already it was producing fruit. So we should carry on both processes every day. We should sow for the future and reap for the past. Every Sabbath the minister should go forth bearing precious seed, and expect at night to bring sheaves with him. Woe to the Church or the minister that has no harvest of souls! He certainly would be a poor farmer who every spring went forth scattering seed, but never in the harvest garnered any sheaves. A few such experiments should convince him that he had missed his calling. Surely in this Christian land we have a right all the time to look for harvest. If in heathen lands the minister, for the first time, to-day stood and explained the plan of salvation to a little company whose mind hardly yet takes in the glad tidings, it would not be much matter of surprise or discouragement if he retired without gathering any fruit. But in this land there are many who to-day listen to the invitation and its explanation urged for the thousandth time—many more who have listened for hundreds of times—and if we toil on Sabbath after Sabbath without results, it ought to give rise to serious questioning. Every Sabbath the preacher should go to his people, the Sabbath-school teacher

to his class, feeling "surely there will be harvest to-day." Friends, is it not time there should be harvest here—an ingathering of souls? For three years my predecessor faithfully sowed the seed. For more than a year I myself have endeavoured to sow. Surely there should be harvest. In some of your hearts the seed of truth was cast long years ago. A mother told you of Jesus and His love. Sabbath-school teachers have spoken to you. The Spirit has striven with you. He would fain help you to break up the fallow ground of your heart. But no; you have refused. Your heart, it may be, is the soil of the wayside—hard, unproductive. We notice that where the farmer has broken up the soil and cast in the seed, but there is no harvest, there is probably a greater crop of weeds than anywhere else. The ground that drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God; but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned. But perhaps the fault is partly with those who ought to be reapers. Many a sheaf has been lost through the carelessness of the Church. We have need to pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers into the harvest. He that reapeth receiveth

wages and gathereth fruit unto eternal life. Who is willing to join in this work, and trust God for the wages? The fields are all ripening, and labourers are wanting. As Ruth gleaned in the fields of Boaz, so do you go forth in the Lord's great harvest-field. Do not despise the meanest. Remember, every soul is of great value, and the reward will be great.

Again, there is the harvest of Death. And surely in this sense we may ask is it not harvest to-day? Yes, every day is harvest with Death. Every day some become fully ripe for heaven—they are gathered to the garner above. Every day some, alas! become fully ripe for the abodes of the lost. Soon, perhaps, he will come for some of us. We cannot tell when. We should always be ready. Then when the sickle's stroke falls on us we shall be garnered in heaven.

There is just one more harvest, that of eternity, with its rewards and punishments. For that harvest we are sowing. You and I have cast some seed in the soil to-day that will bear fruit there. The habits we are forming are seeds that will bear eternal fruit. The influences we send forth are seed. It is a pleasant thing to be popular—to be surrounded by friends. But if sowing the seeds of sin, it is an awful thing. The phonograph storing up the tones of the voice is wonderful; but by some

more wonderful process all our lives are to reproduce themselves. We will reap what we sow. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." The farmer does not reap oats where he sowed wheat. Some time ago I met a gentleman from Vancouver Island. He told me that there are getting to be a great many Scotch thistles there. A gentleman desirous of having the emblem of his native land, planted some in his garden. What a fearful thing to have all eternity sown with the seed of sin, and to be compelled eternally to reap! There is enjoyment in the soul of a child of God, independently of its position. Here is the secret of the songs of praise heard swelling on the midnight air from the walls of the prison at Philippi. Here the secret of the tranquillity, calmness, holy joy, sometimes triumphant, of the martyrs. Their souls were filled with sweetest music, amid the curses and jeers of the mob. Theirs was the joy of being in perfect harmony with God.

It implies a divine relationship and companionship. Christ dwells in the believer. God deigns to commune with him. Truly says the Apostle, "Our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ."

Educational Sermon.

“Also, that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good.”—*Proverbs* xix. 2.

WE live in a remarkable age—not more remarkable for anything than for the increase that is daily being made to the stock of human knowledge, and the wide diffusion of that knowledge among the masses. It would seem as though especially in this age the key of knowledge were given to men, and secrets locked up from the foundation of the world are being made known. In every direction men are pushing their investigations, and every day almost wonderful discoveries are being made. In digging down into the bowels of the earth, men have found that the strata of rocks which gird our earth round and round are a book of mysterious inscriptions, in which are written, as by the finger of God, characters which, when rightly interpreted, will give the history of creation; in other words, geologists profess to be able, from animal remains and various indications on the

rocks, to tell something as to the mode of their formation, the period of their formation, and the state of the earth at the time. In studying these footprints on the rocks, men doubtless have made many mistakes; yet doubtless they have also arrived at many correct conclusions. Searching among the waters, they find them teeming with life—life that dwells in such minute forms as to escape the unassisted eye. Searching the starry heavens above us, they have ascertained the distances, sizes, motions of many, and almost the very composition of some of those worlds that are so far removed from earth that they but twinkle in the vault of night. Equally marvellous with these vast acquisitions of knowledge is the general diffusion of that knowledge. Learning, which was in former ages only within the reach of the privileged few, is to-day, in civilized lands, the common heritage of all. Through the invention and wonderful improvement of the printing-press, books, which are the storehouses of human knowledge, are seen crowding the shelves of the peasant's cot as well as the library of the prince's palace. Ignorance is no longer an inevitable result of poverty. The humble sons of toil may almost vie with the children of royalty in the acquisition of knowledge. Many of the schoolboys of our day have more correct information on many subjects than

the wisest philosophers of antiquity ever attained. It would seem as though the age predicted by Daniel had come, of which he said, "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." Although there are some things connected with the learning of the day that look ominous, still we can rejoice that on the whole this diffusion of knowledge is a blessing, for our text says "That the soul be without knowledge, it is not good."

Man is a compound being, consisting of soul and body—of a spiritual and a physical nature. By the body he is allied to the earth—he is of the earth, earthy; by the soul he is allied to those bright intelligences above, angel and archangel, cherubim and seraphim—yea, to God Himself. When God made man, we read that He made him in His own image. Doubtless that, in part at least, in which man resembles God, is the possession of a spiritual, intellectual, immortal nature. Man thus stands at the head of creation in this world. As one has said, "On earth there is nothing great but man, and in man there is nothing great but mind." This mind, which is our noblest part, is not only destined to live as long as God endures, but is also capable of growth probably during the entire of its existence. He who has endued us with minds thus capable of improvement, has also furnished us with the means of that improvement. He has

not only given us a capacity for knowledge, and a desire for it, but also the means of acquiring that knowledge, and has thus made it our duty to acquire knowledge, declaring in His word, "For the soul to be without knowledge is not good." Our growth of soul, both as to knowledge and piety, God has left largely in our own hands. The mind which God gives a man is like the untilled soil given the husbandman. It may become a desert waste, barren, sterile, or bringing forth only noxious weeds; or it may be a garden blooming with beautiful flowers, and yielding needful food and delicious fruit. Which it will be rests with ourselves. He, the husbandman, must prepare the soil, destroy the weeds, and cast in good seed; so we must carefully cultivate the mind God has given us, storing it with that knowledge which is good for the soul. Knowledge improves the condition and increases the enjoyment of man. God, who has given us capacities for knowledge, has made the filling of those capacities a pleasure. Every fresh acquisition, every fresh conquest of the mysteries of nature, affords pleasure. Apart from religion, the pleasure connected with the acquisition and possession of knowledge are among the purest and best. They are most in accordance with our high destiny and our noble endowments. As we descend in the scale of intelligence, pleasures become more of

the animal kind. The higher we rise, the more refined the pleasures we are capable of. The benefits of knowledge are seen in the improved condition of the people, wherever the spread of knowledge becomes general. When we think of the numerous improvements, the useful inventions and discoveries that have resulted from the spread of knowledge, we see proof of the declaration of our text. *Knowledge brings power.* What a vast increase in the power of man has taken place during the last century! Man was intended as the lord of this lower world, but it is only as he increases in knowledge that he really enters into possession of his heritage. It has enabled him to draw lightning from the clouds, and to make it his newsboy—so swift a messenger that in communicating with our fellows space is well-nigh annihilated. Knowledge has enabled him to utilize the mighty power of steam, and he harnesses it to his chariot and it whirls him across the continents, or he binds it in his ships and it paddles him across the seas. Who will compute the increase of power, the increase of comfort, the elevation of position which man has received in all civilized lands from the spread of knowledge? *Knowledge promotes good government.* We see evidence of this in the improved civil condition of the masses in

lands where the people are educated. As the masses rise in intelligence, and are able to judge for themselves of public measures, no tyrant can bind them down as of yore. They see that liberty is their birthright, and they claim it. Liberty is the offspring of knowledge. Without knowledge people are not prepared for liberty. Liberty in the ignorant means unbridled licence, which ends in anarchy. The tyrants of the past were at once a result and a necessity of the ignorance of the people. *Knowledge gives wider views and clearer conceptions of the Divine government.* We hear the psalmist saying, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." Even to the ignorant man, the sight of the star-bespangled heavens, or the moon pursuing her way across the vaulted arch of night, or the sun flooding our world with light, cheering it with warmth, beautifying it with life, affords a wonderful display of the Creator's power and wisdom, and goodness. But when he knows that most of these stars are worlds larger than our own—when he learns that the telescope reveals many others that are invisible to the naked eye—when he thinks of all these worlds pursuing their noiseless way through the trackless depths

of space, without conflict or confusion, how much enlarged are his views of the knowledge and power of Him who created and arranged, and who now upholds and superintends this vast machinery! The beauties of nature, the diversities of the landscape, hill and dale, lake and stream, are calculated to fill even the untutored mind with admiration at the skill and power of the Divine Architect; but when he enters into a more minute investigation of the works of God, and finds that even a drop of water is the abode of life, that every blade of grass and every leaf of the forest is formed by a process no philosopher can understand, no skill can imitate, how much his wonder and admiration are increased! To the ordinary observer, the human body is a wonderful piece of mechanism; but to one who is acquainted with its anatomy, with the number, the intricacy, the adaptation of its parts, there is evidence of a wisdom that is divine. This knowledge should assist the devout soul in forming a conception of the Deity; it should also assist us in offering Him worship. The psalmist had evidently been studying the works of God when he wrote some of his beautiful psalms. Knowledge teaches us to find

“Tongues in leaves, books in running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.”

Knowledge of the vastness and the wonders of creation should make us humble. Says the psalmist, "When I consider Thy heavens the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained, what is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou visitest him?" Knowledge of the Creator's power and goodness should teach us confidence in Him. This is the use to which our Saviour directs us to apply it: "Consider the lilies of the field how they grow, they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

These are some of the benefits of secular knowledge. We are quite willing to admit that not the enlightening of the intellect, but the renewing of the heart, is man's greatest need. We are quite willing to admit that the intellect may be stored with knowledge, while the heart remains impure and unregenerate. The acquisition of knowledge does not necessarily lead to change of heart. Learning and piety are two different things. One may exist without the other. An idea has prevailed—and perhaps it still prevails to some extent—that learning and

piety are opposed to each other. That idea, it may be, has given birth to the saying, "Ignorance is the mother of devotion;" but we repudiate the assertion. Knowledge is the handmaid of the Christian religion. Other religions may flourish in the dark—Christianity flourishes in the light. Other religions cannot bear scrutiny—Christianity courts investigation. The Christian religion promotes the increase and spread of knowledge. As an evidence of this we point to the fact that in Christian lands, principally, the great increase of knowledge has taken place. Heathen lands are to-day in much the position they were in thousands of years ago, or even in a worse position. Superstition is an incubus, a weight, a clog to the wheels of progress. Christianity is a help—an impulse. While the great glory of the Christian religion is, and ever has been, that it brings spiritual light, it also brings or helps to bring intellectual light; while its principal glory must ever be that it emancipates the soul, it also helps to emancipate the intellect. The great truths it brings are calculated to stir the most torpid faculties, and to awaken the most dormant powers. Christianity has ever proved herself the friend of learning. If at any time a corrupt Christianity has imposed barriers in the way of learning, she has done so contrary to the teachings of

that book which is her professed guide ; for the Lord declares, " For the soul to be without knowledge is not good." " Wisdom is the principal thing ; therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting, get understanding." Any contest between learning and the Bible is an unnatural contest—as unnatural as a contest between parent and child. It is true that knowledge is an instrument that has been as frequently used against the truth as for it. Knowledge is a fountain that may send forth either pure or impure streams. It is a sword in the hands of a fiend—it is a wand of peace in the hands of an angel. The most learned men have sometimes been the worst men, and the greatest foes of Christianity. As the richest soil can bring forth the rankest weeds, so the most cultivated intellect may produce the rankest weeds of sin. Knowledge unsanctified by the grace of God may become a curse. There is opposition to Christianity manifest in a great deal of the learning of the day. This arises, doubtless, rather from evil hearts than from learned heads. In the corrupt state of the heart we find, undoubtedly, the great cause of the oppositions of science of which St. Paul speaks. But the fact that bad men abuse their knowledge is not an argument against the value of knowledge, any further than the abuse of any other blessing is

an argument against the value of that blessing. Which one of the good creatures of God has not been abused? Wealth is a blessing, yet men have abused it in transgressing the laws of the Giver of every good and perfect gift. They have used it in feeding pride, and gluttony, and passion. Life itself, which is an unspeakable blessing to the Christian, has been so abused by many, that, in accordance with the teaching of God's word, it would have been better for them not to have been born. So knowledge, which the word of God declares "it is not good for the soul to be without," has been a curse to many. Men have frequently turned it as an engine against the impregnable ramparts of truth. But the friends of Christianity need have no fears as to the efforts of such. The Bible has endured fierce attacks from other foes in the past. It has come unscathed from the contest. Its early foes have passed away, and are almost forgotten. A later race, the Voltaires and the Paines, are gone, and their modes of attack are abandoned; but the Bible survives, teaching the same doctrines, proclaiming the same glorious truths, offering life and salvation to all. We need have no fears from the foes of the present. Digging down into the bowels of the earth, they shall not move the Rock of Ages, the tried stone, the sure foundation which

God hath laid in Zion. Searching among the stars, they shall not change the course of the Star of Bethlehem. That star shall move on till multitudes are led to Him who once was a babe in Bethlehem's manger. Men may shut their eyes to the light, but they cannot dim the glory of the Sun of Righteousness. He shall shine on till the light that now gilds the mountain peaks shall flood the valleys with millennial glory. It is not knowledge which is to be guarded against, but the abuse of knowledge. Let our schools of learning be schools of piety as well—let the truths of science be taught in conjunction with the truths of religion—let the heart be cultivated at the same time the intellect is being cultivated, then will knowledge be a blessing. For Christians to fear the progress of learning, is to betray distrust in the word that has come from God.

Partial views of truth is another cause of the opposition between science and revelation. Truth can never be opposed to truth. The truths of science, when fully known, must agree with the truths of revelation. The book of nature and the book of revelation come from the same hand; we need have no fear but their teachings will ultimately harmonize. When the mists of error shall be lifted from the fair face of truth, then will it be seen that all truths

agree. This is, perhaps, more than can be hoped for in the present world, for now we at best see through a glass darkly—now we know only in part, but the time is coming when we shall know even as we are known. As one has said, "The grandest truths that science reveals are but glimpses of a larger truth yet to be revealed." It is these partial glimpses of truth that sometimes lead to seeming opposition between religion and science. Ignorance, not learning, is what Christianity has to fear. Another reason for this opposition is, that men have at times tried to push their investigations beyond the legitimate bounds of human investigation. God has placed bounds beyond which we may not pass. Secret things belong to the Lord—things that are revealed to us. I am disposed to think that even theologians have been guilty, at times, of trying to transgress these bounds, especially in their discussions of Divine foreknowledge and human freedom. Again, another reason is that the Bible has been taken to teach what it was never designed to teach—scientific truth. It was given for instruction in righteousness, not science.

But I have hitherto spoken principally of secular knowledge. I have dwelt on this at some length, as I thought proper on the present occasion. But there is a higher and

still more important kind of knowledge—spiritual knowledge. Perhaps to this principally the wise man refers in our text. Where he speaks of wisdom and knowledge, he speaks of them usually in a spiritual sense. Hence he tells us, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;” and again, “The Lord giveth wisdom, and out of His mouth cometh understanding.” A knowledge of the truths that relate to salvation is especially necessary for the soul. Secular knowledge is good for this world; spiritual, for the world to come as well. Of this kind of knowledge the wise of this world are too often ignorant, “for God hath hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hath revealed them unto babes.” If a knowledge of the works of God, which shall pass away, is important, how much more a knowledge of the word of God, which endureth forever! Many of the truths of science are of no practical importance to us—have no very manifest influence on our happiness. Many persons pass happily through this world and safely to the next with very little worldly wisdom. But the truths of God’s word will affect us through the illimitable future. The Bible contains the chart for the voyage of this life, and the laws by which we are to be judged in the life beyond. If a study of the works of

God gives us some conception of His character, we get a much clearer conception from His word. From the works of God we may learn something of His power and wisdom, but in His word we learn what it most concerns us to know—his love.

“ Part of Thy name divinely stands,
On all Thy creatures writ ;
They show the labour of Thy hands,
Or impress of Thy feet.

“ But when we view Thy strange design,
To save rebellious worms ;
Where vengeance and compassion join
In their divinest forms ;—

“ Here the whole Deity is known,
Nor dares a creature guess
Which of the glories brightest shone—
The justice or the grace.”

It was a contemplation of the plan of salvation that caused the Apostle to exclaim, “ Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out.” Nature with all her wealth of instruction, science with her wondrous truths, failed to reveal to us any truth half so precious as the simple declaration, “ God so loved the

world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Well may the poet exclaim :

" Most wondrous book ! bright candle of the Lord !
Star of eternity ! the only star
By which the bark of man could navigate
The sea of life, and gain the coast of bliss
Securely !—the only star which rose in time,
And on its dark and troubled billows still,
As generations drifting swiftly by
Succeeded generations, threw a ray
Of heaven's own light, and to the hills of God,
The eternal hills, pointed the sinner's eye."

But there is a knowledge, more important still, that can only be obtained by experience. It is one thing to have heard of God's love by the hearing of the ear ; it is another thing to have felt it shed abroad in the heart. When science tells me of the millions of worlds that roll through universal space, I am overwhelmed with the thought of the power, the vastness, the majesty of Him who created and who sustains these. When the Word tells me that this Being gave His Son, who is equal with the Father, co-eternal, to die for the world, I am overwhelmed with the view of infinite love ; but when, by a personal revelation to my heart, that Being is made known as

my friend, as loving me, even me—as blotting out my sins, even mine—when

“I can with confidence draw nigh,
And boldly, Abba, Father, cry,
And know myself His child,”

then my heart is filled with rapturous joy no tongue can express; then I know, as never before, the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of God, which passeth knowledge. This knowledge removes the guilt of past transgression; for there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. It brings peace; for being justified by faith, we have peace with God. It removes anxiety for the future; for He who withheld not His own Son, but freely gave Him up for us all, shall with Him freely give us all things. It removes the fear of death; for we know that if the earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. It gives confidence in view of judgment; for if God be for us, who can be against us? It is God that justifieth, who is He that condemneth? It makes known to us our high dignity and rich inheritance; for we are children of God, and if children then heirs. It brings strength; for we are strengthened by His Spirit's might. He who has this experi-

mental knowledge really knows more of God than the learned theologian who has it not; for the true knowledge of the glory of God is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. It is not taught in the schools, but by the Spirit, and even the dullest may acquire it, for a "wonderful fashion of teaching He hath." This knowledge especially is good for the soul; without it the soul can neither be happy nor safe. Have you this knowledge? If not, I present it as your privilege. Certainty may take the place of doubt, until you can adopt the confident language of the Apostle, "We know that when the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Brethren, grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord.

XVI.

Trial, Fortitude, Faith.

“The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him. But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.”—*Genesis* xlix. 23, 24.

THESE words are found in the blessing pronounced by Jacob on his favourite son, Joseph. Jacob's life had been a long and, apparently for the most part, a stormy day. In youth we find him a fugitive, flying from home, and from a brother's wrath. In later years, again, we find him flying from his father-in-law. Then the death of Rachel, the misconduct of his sons, the loss of Joseph, the seven years' famine, seem to make his life one long disaster. But his evening has burst from behind the clouds. Joseph is found. Jacob is permitted once more to look on his son—to find him a prince in the land of Egypt. He himself is honoured with an interview with the king, and is assigned the part of the land of Egypt best suited to his occupation as a shepherd. But his long and eventful

life is drawing toward a close. For one hundred and forty-seven years he had wandered up and down, and now he feels that death, the messenger that never forgets any of us, has come for him. He calls his sons to his side, and, in language of wonderful simplicity and beauty, describes the character of each, and predicts the future of their descendants. The language seems to be inspired poetry, some of the beauty of which may still be seen, though much, doubtless, has been lost in the translation. The patriarch presents the character of each son in a picture—a picture so life-like that a child can easily distinguish the traits of each. Judah is a lion's whelp, denoting the strength, courage, and warlike qualities of the tribe. Issachar is a strong ass couching between two burdens, representing, perhaps, the disposition of the tribe to bear burdens, or, perhaps, the situation of their territory, lying between two mountains. Dan is a serpent, denoting the craft and wisdom of the tribe—wisdom not joined with the harmlessness of the dove, but with the treachery of the adder—"an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward." Joseph's future, or that of his descendants, is represented by a vine springing up by a well, and, consequently, abundantly supplied with moisture, and running over a wall, representing the wide

domain to be occupied by his descendants. Two tribes were descended from him, and two portions in the land were assigned them. Then he refers to his past history, his trials, by comparing him to an archer shot at by other archers. I. Joseph's trials: "the archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him." II. His fortitude under trial: "his bow abode in strength." III. The source of his fortitude: "the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob."

I. *Joseph's Trials*.—He was tried by the envy and hatred of his brethren. They hated him because he was his father's favourite, and because of certain dreams he had related, which seemed to indicate an ambition to rule over them; but probably the chief cause of their hatred was his uprightness. He had felt it his duty to make known their misdeeds to his father. The character of a tale-bearer has nearly always an odium connected with it. Yet, the duty of making known the evil deeds of others, may be as binding, and the performance of it as commendable, as any other, when it is performed from a right motive. To perform such a duty toward brothers whom he loved, and to be hated by them in consequence of it, must have been extremely trying. If there is any place where we look for confidence and affection surely it is at home;

but even Joseph's father seems to have suspected him of an evil ambition, for he says, "Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee, to the earth?" So strong did the hatred of his brethren at length become that they were about to imbrue their hands in his blood, and were only restrained by their greed for gain. They embraced an opportunity to sell him as a slave. He is carried down to Egypt. Can you imagine anything more crushing to the tender feelings of young Joseph than to be hated with such a cruel hatred? To be sold as a slave by his brothers! What could be more disastrous to either the temporal or eternal prospects, than to be surrounded by the most degrading influences, mental and moral, which always accompany slavery? Surely, Joseph's lot appeared a hard one! If he looked back on the past, there was only the memory of unkindness, and cruelty almost diabolical—and that, too, from brothers. If he looked forward, continued degradation, accompanied by continued cruelty, seemed his only prospect. No sooner did appearances commence somewhat to brighten, than from his very integrity fresh trials sprang. Calumny fixed her dark stain upon his character. He is cast into prison; becomes again the companion of the debased. Well might Jacob say, "the archers have hated

him, and shot at him." God's people have often, apparently, been left as a target for the adversary. They have frequently been compelled to say, "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." Yet, even this is done in wisdom and in goodness; for in the daytime God has commanded his loving kindness, and in the night his song has been with them, and the song has been sweeter, and the loving kindness has seemed more tender and compassionate, because of the severity of the trial through which he has passed.

The circumstance that must have made his trials doubly severe was, that they had arisen from his integrity, or from circumstances over which he had no control. Had he been less faithful in reporting his brothers' misdeeds, they would not have hated him with such a cruel hatred. As for the dreams, they had come unbidden, and had been related in the simplicity of his heart. As for his father's favouritism, he was not to be blamed for that. Had he been less pure he would not have been cast into prison. It is hard, under any circumstances, to submit to trial. It is doubly so when we feel that it arose from no fault of our own, or from our uprightness. If there is anything that tries a man's faith in God, it is to be endeavouring to serve Him, and yet have that attempt lead to misfortune—we

are so apt to think that when we do right, God should prosper us even in our temporal affairs. The friends of Job argued that his misfortunes were proofs of his wickedness ; but the argument was based on a false assumption. The righteous are promised no exemption from trial ; rather, it is intimated that their very righteousness may give rise to trial. " Many," says the Psalmist, " are the afflictions of the righteous." Again, we read, " If we receive chastisement, God dealeth with us as with sons." Trials are a discipline needful, and wisely ordered. Yet, in the hour of trial it is difficult for us to look at it in that way, especially when they arise from our uprightness. The very foundations of our faith will then be tried. The enemy will tauntingly whisper, " Where is now thy God ?" If God approves of righteousness, and smiles on all efforts to serve Him, why am I thus ? Here are bad men all around, Joseph might say, guilty of the crimes of which I am falsely accused, yet they go free, while I am punished. Frequently have God's people to endure a somewhat similar trial. A man of integrity fails, while he sees the dishonourable around rising. The Psalmist was troubled by this thought. He saw the wicked flourish as a green bay tree ; not in trouble as other men, nor plagued like other men ; there were no bands in their death. We are to be

tried so as by fire, and one of the most fiery of all trials is to be overwhelmed by calumny and misfortune when striving to do right—to have our good evil spoken of, to have our fidelity lead to disaster. We do not attempt to give a reason for this now, but simply remark, that to expect a worldly reward for righteousness is a mistake. The time is coming when men shall return and discern between the righteous and the wicked—between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not—but that time is not yet.

Another circumstance in the trial was, that it tended to shake his confidence in men. One of the greatest shocks a man's moral nature receives is when he is first compelled to believe that men are bad and not to be trusted. The tendency is so strong to lower ourselves to the moral standard of those around us. Others do it; I will have to if I succeed. In my business with others I am constantly met by dishonesty. I must meet dishonesty by dishonesty, and deception by deception, or I must go to the wall. Self-interest will give apparent weight to a very feeble argument, and overbalance conscience. Thousands are bolstering themselves up in dishonest practices in that way. The conviction that their fellows are bad has too much influence over them. Looked at merely from a worldly standpoint, it does not always seem that honesty is the best

policy. There is many a dishonest man who makes and keeps a great fortune. There is many an unscrupulous public man who makes and keeps popularity. Be willing to fail in the eyes of men, that you may succeed before God. We must not as Christians base our action on any maxim of worldly prudence. We must take higher ground. The man who is determined to be a Christian must not make success in life his great object. Fidelity to God and duty must be paramount, regardless of its influence on our worldly success. His (Joseph's) trials tended to shake his faith in God and in man. He found hatred where he had a right to expect love; treachery where he had reposed implicit confidence; and vileness where he had the best right to look for purity. His uprightness does not appear to meet with smiles from God. The unprincipled prosper, while he was overwhelmed with disaster. His brothers enjoy the comforts of home, while he was a wanderer and a slave. His false accuser riots in luxury, while he languishes in a dungeon. How strong the temptation to give up all effort for godliness and to rush into sin! Yet how frequently have vice and wickedness been apparently triumphant, while virtue and honesty are oppressed. How often has God looked down on scenes like this, yet no thunderbolt of justice has smitten the

oppressor, or vindicated the cause of the righteous. Strong faith alone will bear one through such trials.

But Joseph was not only tried by the severest misfortune, but also by the greatest prosperity. By one of those mysterious revolutions which sometimes take place in human affairs, he is suddenly raised from the lowest strata of society to the highest—from a prison to a throne—from slavery to lordship. This is, perhaps, a greater trial even than the first. Many a man has proved equal to the temptations of poverty who could not withstand those of wealth. Poverty and lowly position help to keep many of the evils of the heart in subjection, while wealth gives them loose rein. The temptation is especially great to those who rise suddenly. Few men can suddenly be raised to the high places of the earth without being made dizzy with the elevation. Pride, self-indulgence, and impiety are usually the result. If one is bent on saving his soul, it seems to me the temptations of poverty are preferable to those of wealth. Perhaps the prayer of one of old is better, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but feed me with food convenient for me." With all the history of the past to warn us, is it wise to be as anxious for worldly prosperity as most people are? Such

were Joseph's trials ; surely they were neither few nor small.

II. *Joseph's Fortitude under Trial.*—"His bow abode in strength." The fidelity of the sacred penmen in depicting character has often been remarked. There is no cloaking the faults of its best men. In fact, remarkable prominence is sometimes given to them. Yet there is no stain left on the character of Joseph ; and this, too, in spite of the severe trials to which he was exposed. His character stands out as one of the purest and noblest on record. We must remember, he did not live in the clear light in which we live. He was not fortified by all the holy examples that support us. He lived at a heathen court in times of corruption. As trees in the forest seldom feel the fury of the storm, because of being surrounded by others ; so we in this nineteenth century seldom feel the mightiest gales of temptation, because of others who surround us, from whose example we receive support and protection. The very isolation of Joseph's position makes his steadfastness the more remarkable. Temptation resisted strengthens character. Temptation acquiesced in weakens character. The business man who has passed safely through many times of financial embarrassment comes out a stronger man—stronger because of the energy developed and the wisdom

gained. The tree that on the hilltops has been most exposed to the gales, has struck its roots most deeply into the soil, and entwined them most firmly about the rocks; so Christians, who, like Joseph, have been exposed to rude blasts of temptation, when they have resisted, are most firmly grounded on the Rock of Ages. It is said to be the belief of certain savage warriors that the spirit of every foe they conquer enters into themselves; and thus they accumulate strength for the day of battle. This is true spiritually; every foe conquered prepares us for the next. Physically, the man who has borne the heaviest burden is the strongest man. The boy at school who gets all the difficult passages in the classics translated for him, and all the difficult problems solved for him, may pass very well at school, but he is not developing brain power. Says one of the popular and observing writers of the day: "It is the misfortune with many young persons of to-day that they begin life with too many advantages. It is not the so-called blessings of life that make men, but the rugged experiences." Is not this true spiritually? The Christian who has no trials because he runs around the cross never develops to a strong Christian. Does it not appear strange that the noblest men are found away back in patriarchal times? So in modern

times the strongest men spiritually are those who have a covenant of great tribulation. Wesley and Luther and Knox were not only men suited to the times, but men made by the times. There are thousands of Christians who are languishing spiritually for want of a little persecution or opposition. Blessed is he that endureth temptation even in this world. The spiritual weakness of many professed Christians is at once the cause and the result of their cowardice. As they never throw themselves into any spiritual contest, they never develop any spiritual strength.

Again, trials test character. They bring out the strong points and the weak points. A man never knows himself till he has been put to the test. Many a man in the day of trial has discovered a weakness where he little suspected it. Two vessels are sailing on the deep ; they appear equally well built, equally well manned. But a storm arises ; the mad winds lash the ocean into foam, and the waters rise in mighty waves. The crew of one prove themselves masters of the position ; the ship rides proudly over the deep ; she weathers the gale, and safely reaches the harbour. The other proves unseaworthy, and is wrecked. The storm has tested them. Two firms are doing business in the same street ; they appear equally reliable. But a financial panic

comes. One suspends payment; it is seen that all along her foundations were not sound. The other survives, and is proved to be reliable. I say trial reveals character. The house built on the sandy foundation of man's own righteousness appears just as strong as that built on the Rock of Ages, till the rain descends and the winds blow. Many a man will have to thank God for ever for the trial that has revealed to him his weakness. We sometimes speak of the solemn Day of Judgment; it will be so. But we should never forget that it is preceded by an equally important day—the day of trial. The decisions of the Day of Judgment are to be in accordance with the characters revealed in the day of trial. "Judge yourselves, that ye be not judged." Every trial we suffer gives us an opportunity of forestalling the Day of Judgment, of so ascertaining our weakness and our sins that we may become penitent and be forgiven, and thus saved from the judgment of condemnation at last. Notice the strong points in Joseph's character, brought out by his trials:

(a) *Fidelity*. Notwithstanding his fidelity in his father's house met with such poor return, he was just as faithful to his master in Egypt. Honesty is the best policy. Some are honest from policy. Not so Joseph. He was honest from principle. When his uprightness brought

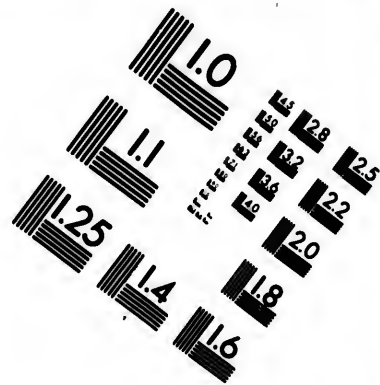
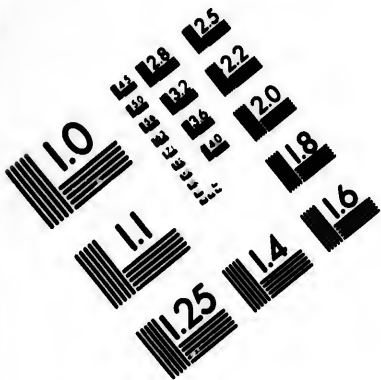
apparently only trouble, he was just as upright. He would do right from principle, without reference to earthly reward. His trials brought out another grace—

(b) *A Forgiving Spirit.* "Be kind one to another;" "Forgive us as we forgive." These were not written in the outward law in the days of Joseph, but they were written by the finger of God on the fleshy table of his heart. Where will you find a fuller exemplification of these New Testament precepts than in the conduct of Joseph? Where, in human act, anything that so nearly approaches the Saviour when he prayed, "Father, forgive them?" Nothing could be baser than the conduct of his brethren. Now, at length, he has it in his power to make them feel the weight of his resentment. To fallen human nature, revenge is sweet. He might have said, "If I do not take revenge, I will not return my brotherly love. I will treat them with cool indifference." But no; his love seems just as warm as ever. You can scarcely find a more touching scene than the meeting of Joseph and his brethren. (Gen. lv. 1-5, 13, 14.) How kindly he interests himself in securing an abode for his brethren! How different from the spirit manifest in the world—alas, too often manifest in the Church to-day! How men treasure up the memory of every little injury!

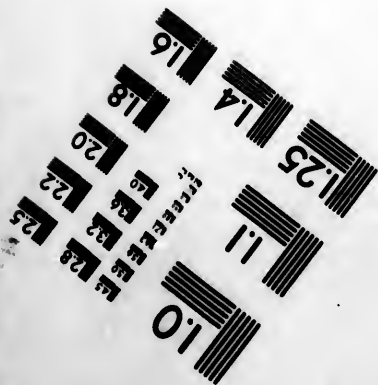
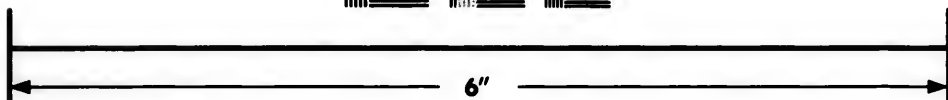
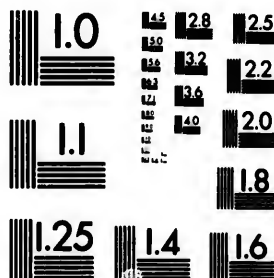
Years after, they seem to take a malicious pleasure in stirring up their resentment by a recital of their wrong. You have met a man who once occupied high positions of public trust. He has endeavoured, as he believes, faithfully to discharge the duties of his trust. But the tide of popular favour turns. He is hurled from his eminence, and now he is never tired talking of the ingratitude of men. His spirit is soured toward men. Joseph's spirit was neither rendered haughty by elevation nor soured by misfortune.

(c) *Humility.* His superior abilities, courtly manners, the unpopular employment and lowly condition of his brethren—these did not make him forget them. How quickly superior abilities, or greater wealth, or higher position make us act haughtily toward those with whom we once were familiar, as if made of finer clay! Then

(d) *His Faith.* What a wonderful exhibition of the graces required in New Testament times! As we study his noble character, so pure, so faithful, our estimation of human nature as renewed by the grace of God rises. Away in the dim light of the distant past he lived a life that is a pattern for us. Like some mountain peak that pierces the clouds and bathes its brow in the clear sunlight, unshaken by the dark



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storms and unstained by the dust-laden atmosphere of this lower world ; so the character of Joseph towers before us unstained by surrounding impurity, unshaken by direct temptation—a monument of God's wondrous grace.

III. *The Source of Joseph's Strength.*—Faith in God. “The arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.” Here is the secret of his strength. During all those dark, dark days when fidelity only seemed to lead to fresh disaster, Joseph was leaning on the faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God. It required strong faith to sustain him during those dark days. It is easy trusting when things go well with us, when friends flock round us, when the sun shines brightly on us ; but not so easy when the fig-tree does not blossom, when friends forsake us, and “joys are withered all and dead” —when, as to Paul and the voyagers of old, for days neither sun nor stars appear, when our frail bark seems drifting before the storm toward some desolate shore, then it is not so easy. Joseph had learned to trust the divine faithfulness, and resting there his foundation was as secure as the throne of God. In youth he commenced to build aright. The conscientiousness he displayed there revealed the origin of the noble character he afterwards developed. Let me recommend you to the religion of Joseph,

and the faith of Joseph. We live in a world where much that happens to ourselves and others is mysterious. Have faith in God. "What we know not now we shall know hereafter." Clouds and darkness are round about Him, yet righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne. Righteousness must in the end be triumphant, and sin must be overthrown. Joseph's trials were a preparation for his triumphs. So will ours be, if faithful. In Joseph's elevation we see a representation of what will take place in all God's children. They are to reign. The time is coming when every child of God shall be exalted. The trials of earth are a fiery furnace where God's people are being purified. Trust in Christ as a personal Saviour, and in God's promises, which will strengthen as nothing else will.

If in His furnace He refines thy heart
 To make it pure,
 Then only ask for grace to trust his love,
 Strength to endure.
 And if fierce storms beat round thee, and the heavens
 Be overcast,
 I know that He will give his weary one
 Sweet peace at last.
 Strong in faith, tread thou the uneven ways,
 And bare thy head unshrinking to the blast,
 Because thy Father's arm is round thee cast ;
 And if 'thy way seems rough, then only clasp
 The hand that leadeth thee with firmer grasp.

Have you faith in Joseph's God? It is this alone that, like an anchor, will keep your soul from drifting amid the storms of life. Trials strengthen, but only those who have faith in God. The shores of the sea of life are strewn with wrecks of those who went forth trusting to their own strength. How many have found their mistake when too late! Scarcely a day or hour but some wail of lament goes up from some who have rejected the help which the religion of Christ offers.

XVII.

Faded Leaves.

“We all do fade as a leaf.”—Isaiah lxiv. 6.

GOD speaks to us through Nature as well as through His Word. The clearer revelation is doubtless through the Word. Yet that Word is illustrated and made clearer still, and more impressive, by the teachings of Nature. It is not only important to have ears to hear what God says to us through the Word, but to have eyes to see the lessons He stamps for us on the canvas of Nature as the seasons pass by. It seems but a very little time ago since we were considering the lessons of the harvest time. Now we are almost at the close of autumn, and winter is just at our doors. To-day we turn your attention to lessons Nature has been teaching for weeks past: Human frailty—life's brevity. “We all do fade as a leaf.”

I. The prophet, it may be, uses the expression in a spiritual sense. The prophet has been confessing the sins of the people. “But we are all

as an unclean thing—we all do fade as a leaf,” *i.e.*, the colour and life of our piety has departed. Instead of being full of life as it should be, it was as a withered faded leaf. In this sense we may apply it to many among us. Are there not some who but a little time ago, under affliction, made good resolutions and solemn promises? and already these promises and resolutions have faded from memory, or ceased to influence the life. Their iniquities, like the wind, have taken them away. As the autumn gales have torn the leaves from the branches and swept them away, so the gales of temptation have swept them away from pious resolve and holy desire. Short as is the period from green leaves to withered foliage, the duration of the piety of some is shorter still. There are some who, a few months ago, united with the Church; but to-day their efforts have ceased. Their goodness was like the morning cloud and the early dew. To-day, spiritually, they are faded leaves. Faded leaves usually are easily shaken from the branch; so persons whose piety has lost its life are usually easily shaken from the Church. Yet are there not some whose piety is fitly represented by withered leaves, who yet have not gone so far as to leave the Church? Once there was life and vigour in their piety. To-day it is a lifeless form. To-day, here and there you

may see a tree covered with faded leaves that still cling to the branches with wonderful tenacity. The autumn blasts, and even in some cases the winter storms fail to shake them off. So sometimes is it with professors. They cling to the Church after they have ceased to derive or confer any benefit. They have lost vital connection with Christ. My friends, are there any of us whose spiritual condition is illustrated by faded leaves? Once we were conscious we had life. We drew it from the great spiritual vine, Christ Jesus. You felt the current of spiritual life coursing through your being. Prayer was a delight. What you did for the cause of God you did gladly, for the life within prompted you to it. You not only derived benefit from religious services, but you were a benefit in them. Your glad experience, your fervent prayers, your consistent life, were a blessing to the Church. Now prayer is formal. The life is neither earnest nor consistent. Duty is an irksome task. The profession is a faded leaf. My friends, in order that our Church connection may benefit us, we must maintain connection with Christ. Life flowing from Him will permeate your being. The Psalmist describes the righteous as "a tree planted by the rivers of water . . . his leaf also shall not wither." Seek to be planted by,

to drink of, the river the streams whereof make glad the city of God ; in other words, live near to Christ ; by faith, every day draw from Him. You have noticed that trees which grow along the banks of perennial streams are green and beautiful in the dryest summer. Isaiah prophesies that a man shall be as rivers of water in a dry place. Those who live near to Christ are near a perennial stream. Times of spiritual drought come to the Church, but such Christians live and thrive, while others are like the faded leaf. How cheering it is to meet a Christian who dwells near the river—whose leaf of profession does not wither ! How discouraging to meet one who is like the barren fig-tree Christ cursed—nothing but the leaves of profession, and those withered ! Sometimes we hear it said of a professor, “ You will find him, after years of acquaintance, just the same. In every emergency you may lean on him.” How much benefit such are to the Church !—eternity alone will reveal it. By their prayers, sympathies, consistent lives—by their means, to the extent of their ability, they help the cause of God—trees planted by the rivers of water, whose leaf does not wither. Of others it is sometimes said, “ You may depend on them while things are prosperous, but when things are dull they will forsake you.” Oh ! how like a broken reed such prove. Like a

thorn in the foot—hindrances rather than helps. My friends, if you would be as trees whose leaf does not wither, you must dwell by the streams that flow from the Rock of Ages. If you support your religious profession on feeling, or on the state of the Church, you will be like the faded leaf sometimes. We sometimes hear of persons being kept alive on stimulants. So there are some who are kept alive on spiritual stimulants. If such a thing as constant spiritual excitement was possible, there might be hope for them; but as it is, they soon fade. I have no objection to excitement when it leads to the river of the water of life; but when the stimulant takes the place of the water of life it is an injury. Doctors tell us there is benefit in stimulants in certain cases of extreme weakness. Not that there is any nutriment in the stimulant. The theory is something like this. The stimulant arouses nature's forces; when thus aroused they may be made to take in food that has nutriment in it. Many foolish men, however, have made the mistake of supposing there is nutriment in the stimulant, but at last they always find it is poison. So, spiritually, excitement may arouse the spiritual forces within you; may awaken conscience to activity. When so awakened you may be led to the water of life. But, alas! here again some have mistaken

the stimulant for food. But it will not do; the leaf soon fades. Have we not all reason, more or less, to apply the test spiritually to ourselves? Is there the fervour about our piety that there once was—that there should now be? Do we feel that there is anything in this interpretation of the text that applies to us? Broken resolutions, lifeless professions, empty forms, faded leaves.

“ Oh, who shall thus the Master meet,
Bearing but withered leaves !
Or who shall at the Saviour's feet,
Before the awful judgment seat,
Lay down for garnered sheaves
Nothing but leaves ? ”

II. Another more common interpretation of the text is to apply it to our natural life. In this respect there seems at first one point of strong contrast between the fading leaves and the failing of our strength. They seem all to fade at once. As we looked on the mountain side a few weeks ago, we saw millions of leaves all fading at once. It is not so among men. This contrast has struck the fancy of the poetess who sings—

“ Leaves have their time to fall,
And flowers to wither at the north wind's breath,
But all—thou hast all seasons for thine own, oh Death.”

Yet it is not a perfect contrast even in this

respect. There is more resemblance even here than at first appears. Many a leaf has withered before the autumn frosts. Many a leaf has been scorched by the summer's sun. Many a leaf has faded, torn from the stem by summer storms, or broken by foot of bird, or robbed of the vital sap by insect plunderers. If you look through the forests, even before the frosts have done their work, you will notice the foliage is not so dense, the shadows are not so deep, as in early summer. Ten thousand causes have thinned out the leafy covering. Silently, unnoticed, thousands of leaves have floated to the earth. All the time from spring to autumn they have fallen. So all the way from the cradle to three-score years and ten men are falling. The fact that there is a contrast rather than a resemblance in this respect should only make the subject more impressive. A much larger proportion of the race of men than of the race of leaves perish before autumn. But few reach the allotted age. Speaking, as I do, to a congregation composed principally of the young, I am reminded that but very few of you will reach the allotted age. At all points between this and that you will fade. Some of you, perhaps, by swift disaster, may be hurried away. You will go out in the morning, perhaps, full of hopes—as full of plans for the future as ever.

Suddenly the brittle thread will be snapped, earthly hopes will fade. I have sometimes watched the leaves fall after a shot from a huntsman's gun, cut as by a lightning stroke from the stem. So is it with many a man. A crash of a railway car, an entangling of garments in the swift revolving machinery of a workshop, a flash from a carelessly handled gun, a fall of the ill-built scaffolding, and almost in an eye's twinkling the man is in eternity. So suddenly may some one of us be called away. The fading leaves cut by accident in the summer months preach, "Be ye also ready."

But many, perhaps most, like the leaf, fade gradually. Gradually the effects of age and infirmity come to some. The hair a little more silvered; the brow a little more furrowed; the form a little more stooped; the step a little less elastic. Thus, as the leaf, a generation of the older people is passing away. Soon they will fall by some slight accident or sickness they once would scarcely have noticed. Yes, and many will fade gradually, before old age, beneath the hand of disease. Some we have watched pass gradually thus away: some in raging delirium of fever; some in numb unconsciousness of paralysis, have faded slowly away. In some loved ones we have watched the red rose of health gradually fade into the white lily of

death, as that stealthy miner, consumption, has sapped the foundations of health. As it has been, so will it be. It may be there are grey hairs upon some of us now, and we know it not. How blind men are to the evidences of decay ! We don't like to think our time has come, and only the loudest knockings of Death convince us that he is in earnest. Death and a man—so runs the story—once made a bargain ; the man stipulating that Death should send him so many warnings, that he might not be taken unawares. One day, years after, to his surprise, the King of Terrors stood before him. Death had broken the bargain ; so said the man, clinging to life ; he had sent no warnings. No warnings ? His eyes were dim, his ears were dull, his gums were toothless, spare and thin were the locks on his bent and palsied head. These were the warnings ; they had been sent, yet all in vain. My friends, we have all had warnings. We cannot say when the end comes that we were unwarned. That sharp pain was a warning. That cold was a warning. That accident was a warning. See, then, that you are ready.

We notice some leaves grow more lovely as they fade, and some more unlovely. A few weeks ago the mountain side was one gorgeous picture. Nature sometimes, like a wealthy lady we have read of, puts on her most beautiful

robes at death. Thus should it be with the Christian. As we pass away we should be robed, not in costly robes of earth's manufacture, but in the more costly and more beautiful robes washed in the blood of the Lamb. We were made in the image of God. Affliction and decay should but restamp that image and bring out more clearly the God-like features. Some of the most lovely Christian characters have been those of persons fading beneath the hand of disease. Some very commonplace leaves become resplendently beautiful when touched by autumn frosts. "I did not think she could die so," said a husband of his wife, a modest, quiet Christian, who had passed away triumphantly. Very frequently the last days of Christian people show a marked increase in all that is lovely and attractive. The biographer of Wesley notices how his character mellowed as old age approached. Perhaps in the vigour and energy of life he was almost severe at times. He was so busy with the hard, earnest work of life that he had hardly time for cultivating or manifesting anything like a forbearing spirit. But there was beauty in his soul, and as his end drew near it shone out more and more through his life. What more beautiful scene in his life than its close, when he exclaims, "The best of all is, God is with us." There are many scenes in the life

of Paul where the grandeur of his character shines out, but where does the brightness and beauty shine out more clearly than just at its close? He is a prisoner; a prisoner in near prospect of death. His life since his conversion has been one of many trials and sacrifices. This is to be its close. Any man who could meet a fate like that without murmuring, without distrust, must have the pure gold in his character. Now hear the man of God: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." We dread affliction, trial, decay of strength; yet these to the Christian are autumnal frosts that bring out more clearly the lovely graces of the Spirit. Some of the loveliest faces we have seen have been those made so by the calm submission, the patience, the resignation, the trust, stamped slowly by affliction as they have faded toward the grave. Of such the poet sung,

"Fourscore! Yet softly the years have swept by thee,
Touching thee gently with tenderest care;
Sorrow and death they did often bring nigh thee,
Yet they have left thee but beauty to wear."

We had an example of the opposite kind last Sabbath evening. All the beauty of Saul's character is seen in his younger days. As old

age drew near he became unhappy, melancholy, unamiable. Everything attractive dies in him. He goes from bad to worse, and the last scene is the darkest of all—he ends his life as a suicide. It is a sad thing when a man feels the best has passed. What more natural than that such a one should grow melancholy and miserable? Another, referred to last Sabbath evening, sung in words often quoted,

“ My life is in the withered leaf.”

My friends, if your last days are to be your brightest, you must keep the grace of God in your hearts. Life's trials apart from the grace of God are apt to mar the character and make it unlovely. Like the heavy blows of the sculptor's hammer, which bring beauty out of the rough stone, the painful experiences of life are intended by the Divine Architect to shape our characters after his own image.

The leaves fade to make room for others. Before one generation of leaves passes away another exists at least in embryo, ready to take their places under the influence of the summer's sun. So one generation of men fades to make way for another. There is a generation treading in our footsteps, ready to take our places. Many a man in the pride of his heart imagines when

he passes away he will leave a gap ; but ten thousand men drop out of the ranks of the living every day, yet the ranks are kept full as the race marches on. This world is a testing place for human beings. All the race could not dwell here at once ; so one generation comes and fades to make way for another.

Each race of leaves as it fades and falls enriches the soil from which others are to spring. So the influence of our lives will go down the ages and help form the characters of generations yet unborn. We are to-day developing in an atmosphere enriched or poisoned by the influence of the generations that preceded us. The generation of the present is very much what the generations of the past have made them. So the generation that succeeds us will be formed largely by the influences we leave. It is a truth that does not affect men much, yet a truth that ought to do so. Our influence will live after us ; it will be a stream of healthful influence or a poisonous stream, a curse or a blessing, according to our character. Most men seem to have the false idea that their course in life will affect themselves alone ; but it is not so. Your influence is not only contemporary with you, but will live long after you—perhaps after you are forgotten. If you live a holy life, you will have an influence for good not only on the

next generation, but probably to the latest generation. If unholy, the influence you exert will, of course have a tendency to evil. "It will be all the same a hundred years from now," is a favourite saying with some; but it is not true. Every influence we send out into the world is destined to be permanent. The world may be worse or better a hundred years from now, according as your influence is good or bad. It may be difficult or impossible for us to distinguish what flows from the influence of an individual. Yet there is One who can trace the stream back to its source, even when it has flowed through hundreds or thousands of years. And when the sum is added up, we shall find that life was not the meaningless thing we thought it as we trifled it away. As we gaze on its grand, awful results, we will realize how solemn a thing it was to live.

The slender stem which supports the leaf is a fit emblem of the frailty of human life. How slight an accident severs the leaf from the branch. A falling limb, a child's hand, a bird's foot, a breath of wind may do the work. So feeble is our hold on life. A neglected cold, a slight wound, a grain of poison, a little slip, and the brittle thread is snapped. Well may we exclaim,

"On what a slender thread hang everlasting things!"

Yes, this brittle thread of life is all that keeps our eternal interests from being settled. "As the tree falls, so shall it lie." Eternal interests! How imperfectly can we grasp the thought. Yet all that keeps many from eternal loss is life's brittle thread. Death every day is cutting it. Any day he may do his work with us. In view of this, how careful should we be to have our eternal interests secure. You may do it. The steps to be taken are pointed out in the Book. A man invests a few thousand dollars in a house for himself; at best he can enjoy it but a few years. Even if he lose it, his strong hands and strong will may build him another. But he says, "I don't know what day the hungry tongues of flame may lick it up," and he insures. Yet a man knows that ten million years are hanging on this brittle thread, and day after day he puts it off; he means to have it done, but not yet; till some day a gust of wind comes, the leaf falls, the soul is lost.

A writer unknown to me has a parable something as follows: A man is shut up in a fortress under sentence of perpetual imprisonment. He is obliged to draw water from a reservoir into which no fresh supply is ever poured. How much it contains he cannot tell. He knows not that the quantity is great; it may be very small. He has already drawn a considerable supply.

Imagine how he would feel. Not as if he had a perennial stream to draw from. "I have a reservoir, I may be at ease." No, "I had water yesterday, I have to-day, but my having it yesterday and to-day is the very cause that I shall not have it on some day that is approaching." Man is the prisoner; Time is the reservoir. The reservoir has already lost much. The fact that we had it yesterday is a reason why we shall not have it some future day. The reservoir may not contain enough to sustain us another week. Let the fading leave remind us of our frailty, and urge us to prepare to meet our God.

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